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MARY
LEITH

By the Same Author

NOVELS:

THE JESTING ARMY
A FAMILY THAT WAS
THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED
MORRIS IN THE DANCE
THE FULFILMENT OF
 DAPHNE BRUNO
DAPHNE BRUNO
WANDERLIGHT
DAMASCUS GATE
ROSSENAL
TELL ENGLAND

ESSAYS:

THROUGH LITERATURE TO
 LIFE
THE SHOUT OF THE KING

DRAMA:

THE BERG

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MARY LEITH

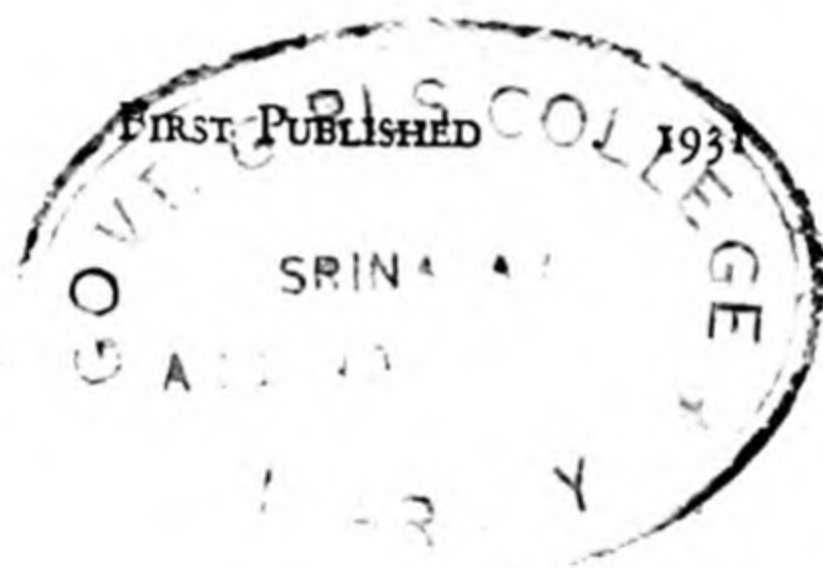
BY
ERNEST RAYMOND



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is the third novel of a trilogy. The first, "A Family that Was," attempted a picture of England before the war; the second, "The Jestling Army," a picture of her at war; and now "Mary Leith" is set in the England of to-day. The whole forms a continuous story, but each novel has been designed to stand by itself, a tale in its own right, and can be read without knowledge of the other two. The whole trilogy will later be assembled as a single novel under the title, "Once in England."

It may be of interest now to tell the inception of this complete work, "Once in England." One day, some three years ago, as I was planning out a new novel, it suddenly seemed to me that those of us who were approaching forty had lived through a remarkable curve in England's story, probably its highest curve, possibly its last great one, and certainly one of deep interest to future students; and that therefore it was for the novelists of the time to show forth all that they knew of that curve, with little more ambition, perhaps, than to be faithful showmen. There was the slow, easy slope up to the war, the dizzy culmen of the war, and this present rather precipitous slope down from it. A trilogy, or a tripartite novel, therefore, at once suggested itself. The first part would have the very tempo of Victorian-Edwardian England: slow, leisurely, spacious, domestic. This I attempted in "A Family That Was." The second part would be wholly war, and it would show, not mainly the torments of a single soul in a dug-out, but a large canvas of England's war all over the world, leaving an impression of her crowded armies, between which the ships of the Navy plied to and fro. This was "The Jestling

Army." The third part would be of a somewhat quicker tempo, to match the tempo of to-day, and it would show—but "*Mary Leith*" is here.

Of one scene in "*Mary Leith*"—the scene outside the Thames-mouth police cells—it should be stated that, for dramatic reasons and in pursuit of essential rather than factual truth, a situation has been there imagined a few of whose details are not strictly possible under English law. Apart from this slight liberty with external furniture, all the strike episodes in this book, including the sentences passed on the men, are based on actual fact.

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PART I

MARY LEITH

CHAPTER I

TO MEET THE NEW CURATE

SOMETHING was happening in the Tin Room beside the Church. Light slanted from its seven windows and splashed on the asphalt yard, and a loud sound of chatterers poured down these seven shafts of light. One pane which had been broken by the Girl Guides three nights before let out through its triangular hole the sharpest ray of sound. Sound, to the fanciful, can be very like light; and this noise in the Tin Room seemed a white glamour of women's voices darkened now and then by a man's baritone or a man's cough. It was easily the liveliest thing in dark St. Wilfrid's Road to-night; and just as the bright windows put out the stars overhead, so this brilliant patch of sound put out the murmur of the sea which was lifting and sinking on the Thamesmouth mud, not fifty yards away.

The lofty church stood in fine contrast to the little Tin Room under its flank. It was dark and shut and silent. It loomed up from the asphalt into the sky, like a rock of grey stone, as solid and permanent as the Tin Room was flimsy and unstable. Perhaps there was a parable here. Perhaps the Church endures; while all that the Tin Room stands for is as temporary and unstable as itself.

The din of voices stopped within the Tin Room, because Mr. Broadley had mounted its low platform and was smiling

upon his people. Mr. Broadley was the Vicar of St. Wilfrid's, Thamesmouth; and there is no man who need smile from a platform quite so often as the Vicar of an Anglican Church whose congregation is held together, not by dogmas, since they all believe different things, but by geniality, since they all like the Vicar. Mr. Broadley relied entirely upon geniality. For years past, in his preaching and his speaking, he had used only wide, unexceptionable generalizations, because these were weapons which one could flourish bravely, yet with danger to none. And geniality was the widest of all these generalizations: it was his generalization of Christianity. So to-night, from his undistinguished platform, he smiled upon his people, who rewarded him with silence. Some who had been standing dropped into chairs by the little round tables where the coffee cups were, and the cakes. Others who could find no seats leaned against the wall.

They were matter for contemplation. So many of them were old; so many of them, whether old or young, were vaguely old-fashioned. . . . Not all. . . . The majority of them were women; and about the dress of most of them there was a faint disharmony because it was neither wholly of God nor wholly of the world. It was noticeable that their complexions were less good than those you would find in the world, because they eschewed cosmetics (one might perceive that there was no smell of scent in the room) though quite a few of them had compounded with the Devil to the extent of using his powder. None of this was true of the men, because there is only one dress and one skin for men, whether they are of the world or of God. Of these men what a number with grey beards! And those that were still young, were they inclined to be a little weedy and anæmic? Not all. Some were vigorous fellows with bright, intelligent eyes. There was matter for a generalization here, but it would not be a secure one.

A conspicuous figure was Miss Pocock who led the Girls' Friendly Society and the Coleborough Diocesan Purity Association. She was the Paid Lady Worker. Her thin figure had been flitting blithely among the people, and her high voice had even been shrieking among the people, because she combined, in the most astonishing way, a kittenishness with her thirty-nine years, and an archness with her godliness. Or perhaps this demeanour of hers was just her Vicar's geniality tricked out in feminine flounces. She had already called the

Vicar a "naughty man," and accused Mr. Bray, the People's Warden, of having "a nasty little temper." She had said "Fie!" to the young man who superintended the Leigh Road Sunday School, and "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" to another youth who called down to her from the gallery over the West Door. It was like Miss Pocock to be the last left standing, and to execute a kittenish run, her shoulders fluttering in alarm, to a vacant chair. She sat fanning herself in an affectation of breathlessness and heat, and, like all the others, looked up at the Vicar.

They saw a man of moderate height, with the slack plumpness and red-veined skin that is the price of drift and fifty. His face was round and limp; his eyes faded but friendly; his mouth square with selfishness but smiling now. He wore a suit of pepper-and-salt serge, baggy and stained, and he was unaware that a corner of his black silk stock had escaped the control of his waistcoat and blossomed under his collar into a little petal of white lining. His hands had gone into his pockets; and this, throwing open to view the width of his waistcoat, seemed to add expansiveness to the smile. His sleeves, crumpling up, unveiled red hairy wrists and a margin of grey flannel cuffs.

The few people of strong vitality in his audience were courageous enough to clap; and the weaker ones immediately copied them. Some of the fatter and rosier ladies even lifted up their hands into the air and clapped them forcibly there. The Vicar smiled wider in acknowledgment; and, since attentive listeners are apt to mimic the play of their orator's features, they all smiled back at him; and none had any idea how fatuous smiles can look when they are extended to a speaker in advance of anything he may say.

The Vicar spoke.

"Well, dear people"—but at that moment there was a jumbled noise of crockery and conversation in the little room behind the platform, where the tea urns and the coffee urns were receiving the ministrations of two steamed charwomen; and Miss Pocock with a "Tch! Tch!" tripped out to quiet it, her shoulders swinging. The Vicar waited.

"Well, dear people, I am sure it is a great source of gratification to myself, and to Alderman and Mrs. Scrase, to see such a goodly gathering of our people here to-night. I know that, if it had not been for the inclemency of the weather earlier in

the day, a still greater number of you would have turned out—but where we should have put them all, I can't say——”

This appearing like the joke for which they had hung out their anticipatory smiles, they allowed them to ripple into laughter. The Vicar bowed.

“You all know the real purpose for which we are assembled, but before I come to that, I want, on your behalf, to offer the gratitude of us all to our worthy Vicar's Warden and Mrs. Scrase, who are our hosts this evening, and to our indefatigable Miss Pocock and all those other ladies who have helped to make this function such a signal success.”

Applause was incumbent here, and all eyes turned towards the tall narrow old gentleman who sat on the left, under the platform, with his long legs crossed and his long arm lying on a table. He slightly raised the arm in deprecation.

In Alderman Scrase the eyes of the audience saw a very familiar figure. Up and down their aisles every Sunday it moved with its peculiar dignity; always dressed with the same precise neatness—striped morning trousers, black morning coat and vest, high starched collar and big bunched tie pierced by a golden pin. They were proud of his fine narrow face so reminiscent of the Iron Duke's, and few of them perceived that, if it was a remarkably handsome face, it was also remarkably empty of light, or that, if as a rule its expression was serious and kind, it could also harden at times with obtuseness and obstinacy. It was only a few waggish ones who, observing this, called him “The Wooden Duke.”

By his side sat Mrs. Scrase, his perfect partner: grey like himself and dignified like himself, but as round as he was angular and as soft as he was firm—refined, gentle, kindly, conscientious Mrs. Scrase, in her black silk dress with the grey fichu and the heavy gold chains. She picked up a gold chain and gazed upon it in modesty while the crowd applauded. People often used the terms “Darby and Joan” when speaking of Alderman Scrase and his lady, and they used them justly.

“I do not have the opportunity as often as I should like,” continued Mr. Broadley, when the applause had dwindled, and it dwindled quickly, for Alderman Scrase was more honoured than loved, “of telling the Alderman, in a public assembly, what a satisfaction it is to our people that the principal lay officer of our parish should also be one of the principal citizens of our borough”—the Vicar pronounced it

“burrow.” “That he has twice been Mayor of our town is known to us all, and that he is always high in its councils; and—sir—I think I may say that we all hope to see you, in the near future, presiding once again over the destinies of this large and important burrow.”

The audience, being an amenable flock, instantly produced their applause.

“Our congregation at St. Wilfrid’s,” began the Vicar again—and they stared up at him to hear about themselves. Most of them had a dim knowledge of what was coming, and were ready to endorse it. They had heard it often before and had always endorsed it comfortably: it was safely generalized and therefore unexceptionable. (“Unexceptionable” is a favourite word of Mr. Broadley’s, and his people speak his language.)

It came exactly as they expected it. Mr. Broadley spoke of the Happy Relations existing between the Civil and Religious Authorities in Thamesmouth, the Necessity of Religion in the Corporate Life of the Body Politic, and the Part of the Church in the Life of Our Burrow. He spoke also of the Message of The Christ to Our Young People To-day, and of Our Obligations, as a Christian Institution, to Our Returned Men, who had a first claim, surely, upon Our People. Alderman Scrase nodded his approval now and then; Mrs. Scrase listened with unintelligent sympathy; and the audience clapped at the proper intervals. These were the ever-recurring topics of their pastor, and though, in his mental slackness, he had but the foggiest idea how his particular church, with its gospel of inoffensive generalizations, could really affect the life of borough, youth, and returned ex-service men, he was sincerely anxious to believe that it *was* doing so—in some manner, perhaps, beyond his comprehension and by the grace of God. To which end he sat on most committees, appeared on most platforms, organized Mayor’s Sunday Services, and became a Rotarian.

“But the main purpose of this little function this evening, so thoughtfully and generously organized by Mr. and Mrs. Scrase, is to extend the cordial welcome of our congregation to one who has just come to work in our midst. He brings all the keenness and enthusiasm of his youth. He brings also, if I may say so, a Great Experience. Mr. O’Grogan, who, from now onward will be my colleague, is one of those—and

they were not a few, I would have you remember, dear friends, *not a few*—who heard the call to their Master's service while they were Out There"—the Vicar pointed vaguely in the direction of the room where the charwomen were washing up—"in the blood and the mud of the trenches. He has served with distinction on many fronts of the Great War—on the disease-ridden beaches of Gallipoli, the scorching sands of Sinai, and in the—in the blood and the mud of France. He has stood for long and terrible years shoulder to shoulder with our gallant, our *noble* men, in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and he has, he tells me, the highest opinion of them. He has seen them in the lowest depths of suffering and agony and—distress; and he has felt most urgently the need of harvesting something of good from all this bitterness and death. He has learnt, I am sure, to say 'We who have seen men cry like a broken child, we know man is divine.' He has glimpsed, like many another, a vision of The Christ moving out there in the battle and the smoke and the din. He has also received the D.S.O."

This drew the longest applause yet; and a young man seated below the platform, on the opposite side from Alderman Scrase, lowered his face.

"He has himself been wounded in the service of his country—a wound that might have been fatal, he tells me, in his head."

Many cast glances at the young man's head.

"Some of us older ones may envy him his experience—not of being wounded, of course"—the Vicar smiled, and the audience, assuming that this was another quip, gave him of their laughter—"but of standing by our gallant men in their Dark Hour, and of comforting them and strengthening them, as I am sure he did—combatant officer though he was. I myself applied for a chaplaincy at an early phase of the hostilities, but I was over military age, and moreover our good bishop assured me that my proper place was on the Home Front, where I could do my best work, keeping the flag of the Church flying—now that so much of its young blood had marched away to the wars—confirming the courage, the confidence, and the hope of Our People at Home, and ministering to those—alas, so many! so many!—who had lost their loved ones. This I tried to do."

The audience clapped, to intimate that he had succeeded.

"But I realized when, in the mercy of God, the Cease Fire

sounded, that I should have but a poor appeal to Our Returned Men, when in the fullness of time they returned to their homes and dear ones ; and I looked round for a colleague who could do for these dear fellows what I myself could never do—for I *do* feel most deeply that they have a first claim on us, at this time. I wanted a man who had been with them in their suffering. Good fortune—indeed, I hope and believe it was something higher than good fortune—led me to Mr. O’Grogan, who, it will interest you to know, was a Captain with our own 15th Royal West Essex, our own dear Thamesmouth territorials, and who has been with them in all their fortunes, on the disease-ridden beaches of Gallipoli, the burning sands of Sinai, the—er—and in all the other places where they served with such distinction during the Great War. This will give him, I feel, a singular appeal to them, and to our Young People too, and I was very happy indeed when he signified his willingness to come and work with me. I am sure he comes amongst us with a very Wholesome Message. He is Irish, he tells me, but we can forgive him that.” (Some laughter.) “I should never have believed it, if he hadn’t told me : he looks quite respectable.” (Loud laughter.) “But no doubt this means that he will be properly pugnacious, and will make us mind our p’s and q’s. And in all other ways, I can assure you, he is quite unexceptionable. I can only add that I hope his ministry here will be a long and happy one. Er—perhaps Alderman Scrase would like to say a few words.”

Mr. Broadley stepped down from the platform ; and the Vicar’s Warden took his place ; and the contrast was sharp indeed, between the grossening untidy clergyman with his genial smile, and the tall, well-tailored alderman, with his handsome features and humourless eyes. Alderman Scrase unbuttoned his faultless morning coat, felt the gold pin in his bunched black tie, and then fumbled with the gold watch-chain and signet ring which decorated his waistcoat. Perhaps it was typical of the man that he should still honour the old fashion of a heavy gold chain and heavy signet rings. He began his speech—and any keen observer in that room (there was one on the right, sitting in the new curate’s trousers) must have known directly that the language of the alderman was going to be as stereotyped as that of the priest, but that its phrases would be those of the Council Chamber while the priest’s were those of the Parish Room. And the same keen

observer, listening, would discern a far sincerer heart behind Mr. Scrase's austere front than behind Mr. Broadley's pleasant shop-window, though he would suspect that the Vicar's insincerity, thanks to the dulling of his inward vision, was less conscious than unconscious. Mr. Scrase was submitting that it would be impossible to add much of value to what had already been said so admirably by their good Vicar, and he would content himself therefore with stating his full agreement and corroboration. There was just one personal note which perhaps he might sound, on this happy occasion when they welcomed Mr. O'Grogan among them. It would be within the recollection of them all that he had lost his own dear boy at the front, but few would know that he was killed in action fighting in the same battle with their guest of honour this evening——

Most eyes turned towards the young man on the right of the platform, but none soon enough to perceive his start and his shiver. They saw him with his face upturned to the speaker. There was nothing strange to be read upon it.

"And," continued the Alderman, "that the duty devolved upon none other than this Mr. O'Grogan—or Captain O'Grogan, as he was then—to supervise my son's interment and to lay him in his last resting-place."

The Alderman swallowed once, and cleared his throat while a silence, charged with sympathy, stilled his hearers.

Most thought that the Alderman was speaking beautifully: only the young man on the right of the platform was filling with wonder that words so stilted could hold a grief so sincere. "Supervise his interment!" He filled not only with wonder but with pity.

"If on no other score," proceeded the Alderman (and "score!" thought the young man), "I must always feel a deep interest in Captain O'Grogan, and I do most heartily join you in felicitating him on his ordination to the diaconate, in welcoming him to his ministry at St. Wilfrid's, and in wishing him every joy and success therein."

Mr. Scrase stepped off the platform, applause following him.

"Mr. Bray?" invited the Vicar.

The People's Warden stepped to the place where the Vicar's Warden had stood; and again the sharp contrast. Mr. Bray was a plump little grocer of Thamesmouth, and one could see that his tailor lived next door to him, not in London like the

Alderman's. His tailor had drawn from a pile that black coat and vest which Mr. Bray conveyed to the platform, and, being an outfitter too, had fitted him with that old-fashioned fourfold collar, that made-up bow tie, that stiff "dicky" which shone between collar and waistcoat, and those detachable cuffs which revealed their detachment so openly, by sinking too far over the large fat hands of Mr. Bray. Mr. Bray opened his coat and pushed a forefinger into each of the lower pockets of his waistcoat; then removed the right forefinger to run it between his round collar and his round neck, and finally gave up the whole hand to a scratching of his head. He had not the elegant speech of his senior, nor the dignified carriage, and he seemed to feel this. He had, however, a happy thought.

"There's one thing I reckon we've forgotten," said he, "and that is Mr. O'Grogan's better half—Mrs. O'Grogan."

Much clapping and laughter encouraged him, and all eyes reached for Honor O'Grogan where she sat at her husband's side. They saw a pretty little woman, with plentiful auburn hair, a round face, and eyes now happily smiling. She was cheerfully if rather childishly dressed in a rose-coloured frock; and, after her pretty face, perhaps the most noticeable thing about her, in the women's eyes, was the width and shapeliness of her shoulders. They "took to her at once." "Most charming," they murmured; "so attractive." And Miss Pocock gushed, "I think she's quite perfectly sweet."

"I reckon we're as lucky in her," proceeded Mr. Bray, "as we are in him. I've been talking to her, and she's one of the best, I can assure you. Our good Vicar and the better of our two Churchwardens—"

"No, no!" protested Alderman Scrase—

"—have been congratulating Mr. O'Grogan on his war service and his Distinguished Service Order, and his what-not; I should like to congratulate him on his wife."

Ah! none were to know that the ache of an old pain beat in Antony O'Grogan then. He was looking up at the speaker with a smile; how could the people know—Honor herself did not know—that Mr. Bray had stabbed him?

"All our wives are important to us in our jobs"—"Hear, hear"—"not as important as they think they are"—"Shame! Shame!"—"but none are quite as important as the curate's wife, especially when our Vicar's misguided enough not to be married. We welcome her as we welcome him, and

that's about all I want to say. A short speech and a sweet one."

And Mr. Bray took himself to his chair, where he touched his brows with a handkerchief.

"Now Mr. O'Grogan himself," suggested the Vicar; and the good-hearted people seconded his invitation with the liveliest clamour of the evening.

The young man was standing on the platform, a tall, spare athletic figure. If ever a figure was English, it was Antony O'Grogan's; England, which had had him since boyhood, must have drilled the Irishman out of him, or drilled him indoors. The face pleased, but more by its intelligence and humour than by its features, though these were good enough; it was a youthful face, and its youthfulness was heightened by the early greying of the hair above the ears and by the lines of contemplation scored across the brow. The eyes held the audience; they were whimsical eyes, and brighter than any that had looked at them to-night.

"It is really terribly kind of you," said he—and at this simple opening they began to doubt if he would ever be a good speaker—"to come together like this to welcome me; and I do thank the Vicar, Alderman Scrase, and Mr. Bray for the kind things they have said about my wife and myself. You will understand that I am full of doubts and diffidences about the work I have undertaken, but I shall try to do it as well as I can. I may say I haven't half the confidence in myself that the Vicar seems to have in me, but there it is!"—the whimsical eyes smiled—"we must hope for the best. Thank you all so much."

He had finished. The speeches were over, and the meeting became a noisy *conversazione* again. And among the little knots of talkers one verdict was pronounced: they liked Mr. O'Grogan very much as a man but feared they were going to be disappointed in him as a speaker. But there! it was rather difficult for him to follow two such speakers as the Vicar and Alderman Scrase.

Ten o'clock. There lurks in the misty places of many religious minds a notion that the hours up to ten o'clock are not ungodly. Those that follow it, however, deteriorate

with every quarter that chimes, till at the stroke of midnight their character becomes dubious indeed. Ten o'clock is undoubtedly the top of many a good man's hill; beyond it his day enters upon a darkness more blessed with the grin of Satan than with the countenance of God. So as soon as ten o'clock had clanged from the high places of St. Wilfrid's the Social Gathering in the Tin Room began to break up. Couple by couple, group by group, the guests proffered their thanks to Vicar and Alderman, and their exceeding goodwill to Mr. O'Grogan and his wife, and departed. When the room was nearly empty and rather sad, Antony and Honor gave likewise of their gratitude and went out into the night.

They had not far to walk to their new home. It was a maisonnette in one of the uniform houses of St. Wilfrid's Road. Antony O'Grogan, when he took Orders, had certainly embraced poverty, though it is open to question whether, in these years after the war, an ex-schoolmaster-officer could have embraced anything else. His annual income at its best would not add up to more than £450. He had £150 a year of his own, now that his father and mother were dead; £250 from his stipend, and another £50, perhaps, from the Whitsun Offering. With this for their revenue Honor and he could budget for no more than this tiny half-house, with its study, living room, two bedrooms and kitchenette. He led her into the study, which was a little square room of white shelves all crammed with books. It had a desk under the window and two easy chairs in front of the gas stove. They did not take the chairs or light the stove, for Honor was tired and patting a yawn.

"Bed for me," she said. "Good night, Tony dear."

They kissed; and Honor was satisfied with the kiss. She did not know that it had awoken in him, as it always did, the old pain. It was the kiss of friends, not of lovers. It was the kiss of habit, not of need. And she had long been satisfied with it; and he would never be. Honor was content with "palliness" instead of passion; and he was hungering, in the day-time and in the night-time, to kiss a woman whom he really loved. Fool to make such an ache of it! Honor was a good little thing and very pretty sometimes, and loyal; he should have the sense to make the best of a good thing. To-night he did not let her go at once but passed his hands over her wide shoulders, which had been the first things about her that

he had loved. Strange that he could be quite fond of her and yet she could give him so much pain.

Sprightly always, she lifted herself on her toes and looked at him with eyes a-sparkle.

"Isn't it all going to be frightfully exciting?"

(There! She was miles away from his thoughts. He let fall his hands.)

"Well . . . I found more occasion for alarm than excitement in that comical performance this evening."

"But why?"

"Oh, I dunno. . . ."

"I think it's going to be awful fun. Much better than teaching at Stratton Lye."

"Well, let's hope so. But I wish I were more of a saint."

"*You're* all right. You'll do terribly well."

"Ummm. . . . Doubt it. . . . However, we shall see, we shall see. Good night, my dear."

"Good night. Don't wake me if you're late."

She had not been five minutes gone before, yielding to an impulse, he extinguished the light and went out on to the pavement again. He walked towards the church. That afternoon, on his arrival at Thamesmouth, he had received from Mr. Broadley a key that fitted all the doors of St. Wilfrid's; and now, as he walked, his fingers went into his pocket and felt for that little key. He turned on to the asphalt lane which ran between the great cliff of the church's south wall and the flimsy side of the Tin Room. The square windows of the Tin Room were as dark and silent now as the tall lancet windows of the church; and one saw the stars again and heard the breathing of the sea. There was hardly another sound anywhere, except the shunting of engines far away, and the scream of a tram, as, grating on its lines, it turned into its depot. In the south porch he fumbled about the door till he had traced the lock; he turned the key in it, pushed open the door, and felt for a switch in the wall. Touching it, he lit a single lamp that hung in the centre of the church. Its circle of light bathed litany desk and chancel steps, pulpit and lectern, but did little more than flush the darkness in nave and aisles. The air struck cold as a sepulchre, and there came a smell of varnished wood and dust and cold stone pillars.

Oh, how that smell brought back his childhood! He saw his father's church in Kensington, and Keatings, Joyce, Derek, Peggy

and himself standing in the Vicarage pew—five children arrayed in a descending scale like organ pipes—while the great Dr. O’Grogan faced the congregation and announced: “I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.” And right well had the old man transgressed! Remember that Saturday afternoon in the Children’s Breakfast Room when they learnt that he had eloped with the veterinary surgeon’s wife. Dear old Father. God grant that he had a dozen years of happiness before he died. Mother must have been pretty dull for him.

Tony walked into the centre under the single light; and he had hardly turned and fronted the altar before a rattling high up in the western gable jumped his heart. It was only the church clock adjusting itself to strike midnight. He allowed it to complete its strokes; not till the last sound had died away would he begin to think.

Mr. Broadley’s facile phrases about the Great War, the Blood and the Mud, and Our Returned Men—so glibly formed by the lips, and so little informed by the imagination. One could hate the man for them, as a slack hypocrite; or one could love him, as a poor blind soul. And one loved him. One laughed and loved. Or tried to. Or hoped to be able to do so one day.

“Mr. O’Grogan has been through a Great Experience, my friends.” Words, words, words. Mr. Broadley’s imagination, long disabled by lack of use, had filled them with no real meaning.

What had the experience really been? Yesterday, as he waited for the Bishop’s hands to be laid on his head in ordination, his brain had been at its clearest, and he had taken stock of his position and been satisfied with it. Now, after the first shock of disappointment, let him take stock again. He was in the ministry now, and his feet were uneasy where he stood: only by the practice of contemplation like this could he confirm the feeble knees. Let him walk up and down, hands in pockets, from transept to transept, while he thought it out again.

Tony was an excellent analyst, and he had no difficulty in putting his finger on the beginning of it all. It had all begun, of course, with the sounding of that dominant note in his life, the need to possess someone’s love completely and to give all to him. More than twenty years ago the note had sounded.

A boy of eleven, he had stepped out through the wide doors of his prep-school and seen little Wavers standing on the gravel—little Wavers, eight years old, and beautiful as a girl child—and he had known that he must possess him. He had loved and bullied him, and the story had paled out in disgrace and shame. Then the others, all down the long lane of his youth: those for whom he had tormented himself with love in the most radiant patches of his life. And always Time had slain the love. Always. This was the thought that laid waste the heart. Sybil Chandry, by the lake of Grandelmere. Frank Doyly, in the class-rooms of Stratton Lye. Honor.

Honor! . . .

Then the war; then the "Great Experience." Come now: what had it all meant? The war had seemed to break over him with a sudden light: it had shown him that he must be done with these petty little personal loves; he must uplift and transmute them into a love for the world; he must secede from his devotion to the self within and transfer his allegiance to a much greater cause without; and so, delighted with this idea, he had rushed out of his excessive "personalness" into the brilliance of the war.

And bah! What had happened? All through the war, right up to that fearful moment when he flung the bomb into the pill-box at Passchendaele, he had been more "personal" than ever in his life. All through the war, while his friends were dying around him, there had run, like an iron rod, his paltry obsession that he must do one big deed and have the triumph of a man who had slandered his courage. This had been his master-motive, and it had driven him to the pill-box at Passchendaele. There, rather than lose his chance of humbling the slanderer, he had flung the grenade and destroyed four terrified men, whom quite possibly he might have saved. Noble, wasn't it? His own fame had been of greater worth to him than the lives of men. And they had given him a D.S.O. for it.

Ah, but there had been nobler parts than this in the "Great Experience": else how was he here at midnight, standing in a church as its servant?

One by one the pictures came: Willie Sparrow, dying in No. 201, near Proven behind Poperinghe; Art Webster dying in a cot on the opposite side of the tent; Padre Quickshaw bringing an untidy little Communion Service to their sides;

and he, Tony, kneeling on the matting of the tent-floor, and knowing, as these fine, if sinful, men went out into the mystery, that nothing mattered in life except to love as many of them as possible, to serve them, to draw them closer and closer to one another in bands of love. . . . Knowing it and wishing he could be true to this side of himself. . . . Knowing that, if only he could lift his need of loving into a love for God and the world, he could be true to it, and fulfil what it pictured. It pictured a priest.

Then the martyrdom of Kit Scrase, best of them all. O Kit! . . . "The duty devolved upon Captain O'Grogan to supervise his interment." "My own dear boy was killed in action." Oh, that good old man must never know.

Then the end of the war and the decision: "Dammit, if one's nobler parts kept saying, 'Don't let it all have meant nothing,' one had best do something about it!" And do it now: he was thirty already and could live but once. The enterprise would have been worth while, even if it foundered.

Why not the Church? It was his father's Church, and strong in his childhood. It had entered his blood and was struggling in him. He believed in Christ as the best truth about man; if he could believe in God too—and he had only to believe that "the noblest promptings, these were God"—he was there! He did believe it. Then he could go on, for what more did the moderns ask?

All these thoughts had encouraged him to go on: and so had another thought which came with a gentle, healing face. It bade him call up the humour which had always been in him and demand that it gave him a laughing toleration of all men, *including himself*. His egoism might be very damnable, but he must accept it, and laugh at it, and gradually transmute it. And passion for another person, at any rate, wouldn't trouble him any more. Even before the war, after the decay of his love for Honor, he had told himself that he would never play with the wild torment again; and he couldn't now, even if he wanted to. Yesterday, at noon, the Bishop had made him a deacon.

Yes, here in the church to-night, Tony believed that, with all this wisdom, he had at last put his hungry nature to rest.

And it *was* at rest—but only as a lion sleeping.

He grinned, because that word about the lion was his own. What if the animal awoke? What if he blinked a crafty eye

at the daylight, and rose with his feline grace, and, after parting his jaws in a mighty yawn, began to prowl?

Well, one could only hope for the best, and pray. Yes, pray. He went forward to the altar-rails and knelt there in prayer for a little while.

CHAPTER II

EAST AND WEST THAMESMOUTH

IN the main the railways of England run north and south, and her buses east and west. This is because her industry runs north and south, while her social life lies east and west. The trains bear the Englishman as a solitary tradesman or traveller, or shift and carry for him as a lonely merchant; the buses work for him as a gregarious animal. And the buses move him westward in a black suit and a bowler hat, and eastward in a muffler, cap and corduroys. Eastward with minimum wages, westward with minimum wealth. Eastward to Poverty, westward to Position. One might argue that the configuration of the island has played a part in directing this social movement east and west; one might suggest that the island tends to fall in gentle slopes from the mountains of Wales to the flats of East Anglia, and that the Englishman, having made good money, takes it quickly up a hill. Consider her southern pleasure towns: not one but shows this westward escape of the well-to-do from contact with the eastward vulgar. Consider Eastbourne. The English have created many things to express their manifold genius: they have created the largest of Empires and the loveliest of ships: they have created Shakespeare and Shelley and the grandest corpus of poetry in the modern world; they have created Parliament and the lesser temples of Justice and Common Law; they have created a language unparalleled for luxuriance; and they have created Eastbourne. It is astonishing. In Eastbourne the workers live eastward on the flats, and the wealthy live westward on the chalk hills of Meads. The pier is almost in the middle but not quite; it is a little towards the east, for its virtue and fashion are equivocal. The lawns are well to the west, for they are places of the first fashion.

The sea-front, as it winds from Seaside in the east to Beachy Head in the west, gets cleaner and quieter and selecter and sadder, while the hill, ablow with tamarisk, rises and rises behind.

With or without a hill, the story is the same in Southend, Brighton, Hastings and Worthing. Sometimes the black coats and the bowler hats have built an entirely new town for themselves to the west of the old town, and have called it Westcliff, Hove, St. Leonards, and West Worthing. In the largest of their dominions the English have even built for their safe retirement a whole country westward over the mountains, and have called it British Columbia.

Thamesmouth is a pleasure town. It lies on the north shore of the Thames estuary, where the estuary begins to look like the sea. It has a hill on the right and flat country on the left, and an esplanade that runs along the whole sea-front like a grey band along the hem of a heaving gown. It turns its back to the station and its face to the sea, and, sending its buses and trains east and west, follows the English custom as surely as an English schoolboy will follow the customs of his school. But Thamesmouth is a hundred years old, and its westward town on the hill is a stucco town, not a red brick city like Meads, or Westcliff or West Worthing. In its stucco homes live business men, who, for the most part, discharge their business in London; retired men who, having no business to discharge anywhere, are free to worry about the weakness of the English in India; rich men who, having a high sense of service, or a high sense of importance, or both, seek places in the Council Chamber or on the Magistrates' Bench; some dead rectors' widows with small quiet homes, and dead officers' daughters with private boarding houses for private people like themselves; and some struggling schoolmasters with private schools "for the sons of business and professional men." Alderman Scrase lives in West Thamesmouth, as he lives in Meads and Hove and West Worthing, and Victoria, British Columbia.

And down on the flats, East Thamesmouth sprawls. The roads of East Thamesmouth are not roads but streets, which is to say that their ways are narrower, their roofs lower, and their windows dirtier; and that women gossip on their pavements while children play about their kerbs. In these streets live railwaymen, tramwaymen, carters, casual labourers, general dealers (which is to say, costers), errand boys, tipsters and some

who have no employment at all. Instead of private hotels we have public-houses down here, and instead of private schools the huge barracks of Elementary Schools (the Secondary Schools, we have noticed, tend to shift towards the west, though they are still beneath the hill). There are sticky little all-sorts shops down here such as you will not find up yonder; and a threadbare Recreation Ground with giant-stride and horizontal bar, and Mission Rooms. There are no mission rooms on the hill.

And, as often happens, the Parish Church sits exactly where the two towns meet. The houses of the poor beat up against the east wall of St. Wilfrid's, and the roadways from West Thamesmouth run down to its west door. It is a comely arrangement, but in Thamesmouth, so far, it has not been justified, for nearly all of St. Wilfrid's congregation trickles down those roads from the west, while the easterners linger behind the east wall. They wait there in their herded thousands, like the souls beneath the altar.

On the very first morning after his arrival in Thamesmouth, Tony came out of his door in St. Wilfrid's Road and turned eastward. There was one person in the crowded settlements whom he was eager to find. So eager that he walked rapidly. He walked along a main road that deteriorated with every hundred paces, till he came to a side street down which he turned. It was a street exactly like any of its sisters, the houses grey and narrow, and the doorsteps meeting the pavement. Children in the gutters halted their play to stare after him, and women at their doors stayed their chatter for the same reason and then resumed it with him as its topic. He arrived at a particular house and lifted his hand to knock at the door before he perceived that it was ajar. The doors of East Thamesmouth are as likely to be ajar as those of the west town are certain to be closed. He pushed it open a little further and looked down a narrow passage whose floor-boards were naked except for some ragged pieces of linoleum which dawdled in a lazy procession from the hall mat to the dark kitchen parts. A smell of stagnant air, moistened with cabbage steam, hung in the hall and greeted him on the face. The clock was past the noon hour.

He tapped his stick on the open door.

"Yuss? 'Oo is it?"

A woman's voice pitched this out from the kitchen parts.

Tony coughed; he could not say, "It's me," or "It's Mr. O'Grogan," because the woman in the kitchen did not know him; and he hesitated to say, "It's a clergyman from St. Wilfrid's," because he was doubtful how this household might welcome such an apostle.

"Yuss?" repeated the voice. "'Oo is it?"

This was most awkward. He coughed again.

"Is it important?" cried the voice.

He was not prepared to affirm its importance, nor yet to deny it, and while he was wondering how to express its neutral character, the lady of the back parts surrendered to her curiosity and came out of the kitchen door, wiping her hands on a cloth. She was a fattening woman of forty, with a mass of untidy golden hair. Her face was soft and fresh-skinned, with a pleasant, if harried, expression. Tony guessed at once that, though she might be slatternly to-day and virulent to-morrow, she had the crude flamboyance of personality and the splendid warmth of heart that so often belong to the daughters of the costers. A generous, slovenly, emotional blonde whose richness was running to fat.

She peered shortsightedly at the stranger in the doorway.

"Yuss?"

"Are you Mrs. Wylie?"

"Yuss."

"Tib Wylie?"

Mystified, she stared at his smile.

"Wurl, there's some as calls me that. It's Mr. Wylie's name for me. A sorta pet-name—if you take my meaning."

"I know," said Tony. "He has talked to me so often about you. He was my batman all through the war."

"*Law!*" Tib Wylie stared for ten seconds, and then dissolved her stare in a smile. "You aren't Mr. O'Grogan, by any chance, are yer? Or Captain O'Grogan, as I should say by rights, I believe?"

"I am."

"Well! . . . Well, there now! Captain O'Grogan? Did you ever! Come *in*, sir. Do come in. I'm sorry it ain't tidier for you, but I overlaid this mornin', and I ain't had a moment to put things right yet. What I 'aven't 'eard abaht you from Mr. Wylie! . . . He carries on abaht you six days of the week. Come in 'ere, sir, do." She led him along the passage and into the front parlour.

It was a stuffy little room whose floor-space was almost entirely covered by a bright green saddle-bag suite, a round table and a small bow-fronted sideboard. The larger pictures on the walls were reproductions of sentimental love-scenes played out by beautiful men and maidens in the costumes of another century. One was entitled, "A Slight Misunderstanding," and its partner, "Reconciliation." Next in importance to these fine pictures was the wedding group of Joe and Tib Wylie; and the characters posing here wore the forgotten costumes of twenty years before. In a corner stood a bamboo series of shelves, each holding its strange ornaments. On the mantelpiece were two large shells, a bird in a glass case, a clock in a glass case, and a silver-framed portrait of Joe when first he donned his khaki.

Tony went straight to this portrait, and his diaphragm trembled. Joe stood before him in a uniform impossibly smooth, with his face well shaved and his hair oiled down and his long moustache groomed left and right. Surely this picture placed on record the only hour in history when Joe's khaki was clean and his moustache in spruce array. And one had seen Joe's countenance impudent, or solemnly grinning, or paraded for the Colonel, but never so absurdly self-conscious as this. Pushed into the corner of this frame was a snapshot of four men, and Tony, prying into it, recognized Joe, Art Webster, Kit Scrase and himself standing outside the little dug-out in Leigh Ravine on Gallipoli. This gave him a quick stir of pleasure. It was good to think that his picture, if only a small one, had stood throughout the years on the mantel in Joe Wylie's parlour.

Tony might be looking at a picture, but Tib Wylie was taking a good look at him.

"Joo know what Joe always says, sir? He says 'Captain O'Grogan was a gen'l'man, and no mistake.' If Mr. Wylie's said that to me once, he's said it a hundred times. 'Him and me,' he's said, 'were together for three years, from Gallipoli in fifteen to the Great Retreat in ighteen.' Without a break, wasn't it, sir, except for his few spells in the cook-'ahse?'"

Tony nodded.

"And wasn't you wounded at the same time, sir?"

"Within half a second of each other. The same machine-gun."

"Well, there now! That kind of links you together, don't

it?" said the sentimental Tib. "Well, I'll jest be puttin' a match to the fire. We don't generally 'ave a fire in 'ere of a mornin'."

"Oh, please don't trouble about me, Mrs. Wylie."

"No trouble at all, sir. If I can't afford a bitta fire for you what was so good to Mr. Wylie——"

"Is he at home?"

"No, sir. Not at the moment. No, he's not at home jest nah." She was on her knees before the grate, and Tony, observing a movement of her shoulders and hearing a sniff, knew with alarm that she had succumbed to emotion. "Nah, he's at the 'Runnin' 'Orses,' I make no doubt of it—the public in Smith Street." She sniffed again. "He's generally there of a mornin', at this time. But you'll want to see 'im, of course. I'll see if I can get 'old of 'im for yer." She rose up and, without showing her face, went out of the room into the street. Tony heard her shrill voice calling: "Art . . . Arty. . . . Is your Arty there, Mrs. Whitfield? . . . Arty, jest nip arahn'd to the 'Runnin' 'Orses,' will yer? there's a good boy, and see if Mr. Wylie's there; and if he is, tell 'im there's a gen'l'man come to see him—a minister from the church. No, p'r'aps you had better not say a minister. Say it's a gen'l'man what was with him in the war. *That'll* fetch him. . . . Thank you, dearie."

Returning to the parlour, and sitting opposite Tony, she said nothing for a little, but put her fingers into her untidy golden hair, and lifted it off her forehead as if her head ached. Then she sniffed and spoke sadly.

"Joe ain't the man he was. Nah, it didn't do 'im no good, being wounded—really."

"How do you mean?"

"Wurl . . . Gawd forgive me if I say anything against Mr. Wylie. 'E's always bin a good husband to me—in his way. And he's never bin one for the drink—not more than was natural. But he's lazy, sir, and he don't get no better. It done 'im no good, being a Disabled Ex-Service Man and drorin' a pension. It's set 'im up above himself, if you take my meaning. Him and his Disabled Ex-Service Man! I says to 'im, 'Why don't you git a steady job of work and add to your bit of pension?' and he says, 'There ain't no jobs to be 'ad, ole girl. We've served our country and bin wounded in her service, and nah she's no use for us'; and he goes awf

with his cornet and stands up against the doors of the pubs, and plays them ole war songs, 'Pack up your troubles in your ole kit-bag,' and all the like of them. He says they're winners every time with the men inside—but I dunno: sometimes when I'm aht doing me shopping, I see 'im playing in the street, and I dunno: there's no shyme to it, I suppose, but it's not a good class job—really."

"Never mind, Mrs. Wylie." Tony sought to cheer her up. "He was one of the great men of the war—none of us had any doubt of it. I remember his company commander saying to me that he was the soul of the battalion, just because he was its Funny Man."

"That was young Mr. Scrase, I suppose?"

Tony started, looked at her, and knew that she knew. By her inability to hold back the name, she had given her knowledge away. He quickly diverged from the question.

"Yes. . . . In fact, I always say it was the Funny Men like him who won the war for us. They enabled the others to stick it out."

"Oh, Joe's your Funny Man still, but it don't put much meat in the larder—if you take my meaning. 'No work?' I says, '*No work?* You don't look for work—you and your wounds!' Then he makes out that 'e needs an open-air life because he's got a touch of shell-shock too, though I don't believe he was ever shell-shocked any more than *you* was. Or *was* you, p'r'aps, sir?"

"No," confessed Tony.

"Nah," agreed Tib Wylie, much encouraged by this denial. "Nor gassed either. He says he can't abide stuffy rooms because he's still got mustard gas in his system. Did you ever hear that he was gassed, sir? *I* never."

"We all got whiffs of it sometimes."

"Yes, and that's about as much as *he* ever got, if you arst me. Besides, he could get a job on the roads, couldn't he? But he don't try—not what I call *try*. He says that they ought to find the proper job for a Disabled Ex-Service Man like 'im, and not expect 'im to go on his hands and knees for it; and that it's a cryin' shame to leave a worn-out old veteran like 'im to play a cornet in the streets and tell smutty stories for a living—which I hope you'll forgive me for putting it like that, but that's what it amounts to, and I don't care who hears me say it. But there! *he's* all right, sir—in his *way*. I ain't got no call to

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“speak against him. It’s only jest a pity he ever got wounded, and set up abaht it.”

“I expect he’ll gradually forget it all, Mrs. Wylie, as the war recedes.”

“Yuss,” said Tib; though the “Yuss” answered her own thoughts rather than Tony’s. “Yuss, if he’d never got wounded and never drorn a pension, he’d never have gawn political. He’d have had to find a job and then he’d have been on the side of them that was working instead of them that want to be paid for living. Paid for living, I says, and for being an ornament to the tahn!”

“Oh, he’s gone political, has he?” laughed Tony.

“Yuss, sir. It’s all them fellers he mixes up with at the ‘Runnin’ ‘Orses.’ Lot o’ gammon they talks! I wish to Gawd he’d gawn religious instead. *That* makes ‘em work.”

Tony threw back his head and laughed. “We had some shots at making him religious in the army, but it was not a success.”

“No, but he done it before, sir.” Mrs. Wylie turned her face to Tony and nodded emphatically. “’E done it once. I had got almost over-religious, as you might say, just then—I never quite know what come over me—and I used to go regular to the Meeting here; and I took Joe along, and it proper got ‘im, sir—you wouldn’t believe it! . . . But it didn’t last. . . . Not that Joe isn’t a religious man—in his *way*. I always says as he’s got the real thing in him, but doesn’t know it: he loves his feller man, sir,” explained Tib, with rich feeling; “you can’t deny it—he loves his feller man.”

“I’m sure he does, Mrs. Wylie.”

“Yes; and that’s the source of all his trouble—really. He’s too companionable with them. That was why he went awf and enlisted when he was years over military age. And it’s that more than anything else that takes ‘im to the ‘Runnin’ ‘Orses.’ Oh, you mustn’t think I’ve bin talkin’ against him: we get on nicely—really. We got his pension and what he picks up, and I work sometimes for a lady in Grove Park Road. You know Mrs. Scrase, sir?—she gets me work like that sometimes. . . . Yuss, she lawst her only boy in the war.”

Tib gazed into the fire.

The silence was broken by the noise of boots in the passage. “’Ere we are, Tib,” called the voice of Joe Wylie. “*Here* we are, Colonel! Your Orderly Sergeant told me I was to

report to the Colonel at once. And have I come at the double? Not arf. Up for Orderly Room, as per usual, I s'pose."

He pushed open the door and entered. Joe, in an old blue suit and dusty bowler hat, seemed even shorter and stockier than he used to do in his khaki. And his long Roman nose seemed ruddier than in those days, and his skin more mottled and veined. His untidy hair and long loose moustache were certainly greyer. He gave one look at the visitor; then slammed his hat on to a table; threw wide his coat, thus unveiling an array of medals; shoved both hands into his trouser pockets, and said:

"Gawd's love!"

"Yes, it's me," smiled Tony, who had risen. "How are you, Joe?"

"Gawd . . . strike . . . me . . . blue!" said Joe. "Tib, do you know who this is? It's Captain O'Grogan as ever was! . . . Well! . . . Tib, go and make 'im a cuppa tea, for Christ's sake. . . . Oh, you mustn't mind my saying that, sir—gaw! I didn't see as you were a minister now. Where is it? Swilfrid's?"

"Yes."

"Law! Fancy! You a minister up at Swilfrid's! Tib, pop off to your cook-'ahse and make the best potta tea you done for a twelve-month. Jump to it, nah! We got some military discipline in this 'ahse, sir, whether I'm the C.O. or the missus. Gaw, sir, this 'as done me more good than a pint of stout! Sit dahn, sir. Sit *dahn*." They both sat down while Tib went off to the kitchen. "That's better; and what's wrong with gingering up the fire the first time you come into my little ole dug-out? Gather round the Tommy's Cooker, sir. Swilfrid's. That's Mr. Broadley's, isn't it? I don't know 'im—really. I ain't bin to church since that service at Ee-prez, jest before all the boys were killed. But swelp me bob, if I don't come along sometimes and hear *you*, sir! Jer remember that service in the medder behind Ee-prez, sir, and Padre Quickshaw and all! Law, sir; them were the days. That was Life, that was! J'ever see any of the boys now, sir?"

Tony said that he had not so far seen any of them, but that his chief purpose in coming to Thamesmouth was to find old friends again.

"Yuss," nodded Wylie, "there's a tidy few of the old

Fifteenth knocking arahnd here, sir. Aht o' work, most of 'em, but there! they'll be up in the air when I tell them that Captain O'Grogan of C Company's here in Thamesmouth. Christ! they were times, they were! Remember poor Mr. Hughes Anson, sir—he was a gen'l'man, he was—the bravest man I ever saw, and that pleasant with the boys! Many a time he's passed me at the cook-'ahse, or outside me dug-out, and always he says, 'It's a good war, Wylie,' and I says, 'Never a better, sir. Never a better. . . .'" As always when he made a joke, Joe laid a bashful forefinger along his moustache and looked slyly at his listener. "I says, 'When it's over, sir, you can lay me in me cawfin, because I shell 'a' done with life.' And he says, 'You're a liar, Joe, curse your father.' And I says, 'Ebsolutely, sir. Thenk you'; and awf he goes to be chatty with the other boys. Yes, old Jerry did in a good one when they did him in. . . . Still . . ."

"But I thought you'd gone political," Tony chaffed, "and didn't hold with war."

"Oh, Tib's been talking, 'as she? Yuss, you're right, sir. I'm not saying it wasn't a *capittalists'* war. I'm not saying we weren't used as mincemeat because the big men wanted the markets. I'm not saying we weren't a lot of bloody mutts to fall for it like we did. But that's not to say I didn't enjoy it while it was on, is it, sir? But I tell you what: that little question isn't finished with yet. There's trouble brewin' in Old England. And we shall see it 'ere in Thamesmouth before we're very much older and past enjoyin' it. I hear a thing or two among the railway boys and the tramway boys."

"Why, what's the trouble?"

"They don't reckon as they're gettin' a square deal. Your capittalists made the war and now they're going to use the bloody awful mess the world's in to break the Trade Unions and cut the boys' wages. And we just ain't 'avin' any of that, sir. We ain't playin' the mug's game twice. And when the trouble comes, sir, I shall be in it."

"Don't get bitter, Joe," laughed Tony. "I always thought you were one who couldn't do that. When Fred Roberts used to abuse the Colonel you were the one who stroked him down."

"Ah, it was different then, sir. Then it was me country against the 'Uns. I never 'ad no grouse against Fritz, but he arst for trouble and he got it. And now I've no grouse against

the Masters, but they're out to down the Unions and they'll get it too. And as I tell you, sir: I'm standing in with the boys. Yuss, every time."

Tony, seeing that the old fellow had heated, left the subject.

"Joe, does your wife know anything about Captain Scrase?"

Joe glanced up, alarmed and guilty.

"Why? She ain't bin talkin', 'as she?"

"No, but from her manner I suspected that she did."

"Well, sir . . ." He pulled up the knees of his trousers, and brushed both sides of his moustache with a knuckle. He gave a poke to the fire. "Well, I did tell her, sir, that time when I got 'ome on leave. But she's the only one I've ever told, and that's on my Bible oath. And I bin sore tempted to split sometimes. But I've remembered what the Colonel said, and you, sir; and I've thought of the pore old Alderman up yonder and his missus; and I've held on tight. As far as I know, sir, there's you knows, and I know, and Tib, and that's all—and *she* won't peach."

"Thank you, Joe. I'm glad to hear that."

"Yuss. And often and often I've thought of Captain Scrase, pore gentleman. I reckon he was one of the best, and I shall never say anything else."

"He *was*," said Tony.

"Yuss. And if ever a man died for his country, *he* did."

"Of course."

"And for a lot of bloody old capittalists too," added Joe, remembering his part.

"Possibly . . . possibly," conceded Tony.

"Nah, I shan't let on," said Joe after a silence.

Then Tib Wylie brought in a teapot and cups, and immediately Joe, jumping up, erected a screen of liveliness.

"'Ere's the Orderly Sergeant bringin' the dixies. Thank you, Sergeant. Got your canteen, sir? . . . There you are, sir. That's your ration. Any complaints?"

"Not one," said Tony, who had stood up too.

"No. Tib makes tea when she likes; none of your army stew. Well, sir, here's to it. Here's to your 'appiness and success in ole Thamesmouth."

"Thank you, Joe." Tony sipped his tea.

"Yuss, and here's to the Old Days. . . . And Absent Friends, sir, what? Mr. Hughes Anson. Little Willie Sparrer. . . . And pore old Art Webster."

“And Sergeant Jim Stott,” said Tony.

“Yes, not arf! And Mr. Aylwin, and Mr. Wimborne and—and Another we know . . . Oh well . . .”

“And Mr. Moulden,” added Tony.

“Yuss. Absent Friends, wherever they lie.” Joe, who was quite as sentimental as his wife, drank again, and brushed his sleeve along his mouth. “And may we never let ’em dahn.”

CHAPTER III

THE PEOPLE COME IN

THE new curate began his career in a spot-light of popularity. The worshippers at St. Wilfrid's were good-natured and easy-going folk, unless their prejudices were disturbed, and they would have been ready, with far less help than the Rev. Antony O'Grogan could give them, to pronounce him a great success and "one of the best we've ever had." But he could give them a deal of help towards settling in this comfortable conclusion. With his youthful face and hair grey over the ears; with his laughing eyes and friendly manner; with his slender figure, soldierly bearing and D.S.O., he entered upon his game with a flush of trumps in his hand. The Boys' Club liked him, the Men's Club respected him, the Girls' Club giggled in corners about him, the Sunday School teachers gathered round and gushed with him modestly, and Miss Pocock and her Society of Friendly Girls were sometimes a little coy with him, yet without sin. As for the Mothers, they frankly adored him. Alderman Scrase congratulated the Vicar on "an indubitable acquisition to the Parish"; and Mrs. Scrase echoed her husband's congratulations, as she echoed everything else that he said.

This popularity was very pleasing to Tony. Pleasing, that is, to his sensitiveness; less pleasing to his incisive mind. This chorus of approving voices came from West Thamesmouth and from West Thamesmouth only; and though there was no reason why he shouldn't love the good foggy-minded people of the western hill, he knew that he could give them nothing. They would be sitting in their church with their comfortable creeds about them, whether he was preaching in Thamesmouth or planting in Malaya. The only way he could give them anything would be to offend them vigorously and disturb their

composure; and he feared he would shortly be doing this. If there had been any life in the restless hints which the war had sown in him he must let them drive him where they would. He must not allow popularity to lift his weapons from his hands.

But this attack would wait. For the present there was East Thamesmouth, and he could work in the fallow ground there, not offending the people but pleasing them. It was a very real thing in Tony's heart just now, his love of the common men of England. It was the simplest, but most deeply-rooted emotion that he had brought out of the war: he had brought it home with him from his four years' sight of their endurance, their humour, their bewilderment, their coarseness and their goodwill. They were *real*, he would say; and would wonder what he meant by that.

And if anyone asked him what he meant, he would crumple his forehead and speak of a great friend of his, since killed, who, arguing on the slope of a Gallipoli bluff, and in a hundred other reeking spots, had taught him to hate all opaquely optimistic thinking and to crave reality. And it seemed to him now that the upper classes of England were fairly real, with their self-protecting Toryism, so open and unashamed, their aristocratic superiority to convention, and their simple creed of *noblesse oblige*. And the lower classes were more real, with their coarseness, humour, ignorance and goodwill. But the middle classes were far less real. He summed them up in a clumsy sentence: "They did not think what they truly thought; they thought what they thought people thought they ought to think." They had no courage to say aloud what their minds might suddenly present to them, however shocking it might be; they said only what they supposed a respectable person ought to say. So talk was unutterably dull with them, and real conversation impossible. They were not simple like the people above them and the people below them; nor solid like them. Unsure of themselves and unintegrated, they were fluid and viscid substance which shaped itself always to changing conventions without. Other and stronger people built these conventions and left them as soon as they had outlived their date; and they were always amazed, as they looked back from a considerable distance ahead, to see the excellent middle classes still surrounding and sticking to the last of their leavings.

Of such fluid and viscid stickers as these was the company at St. Wilfrid's.

Mr. Broadley, thought Tony, was an excellent Captain of his Company. His company had created him (though they did not know it) and were his matrix : he, in his turn, had created them, and was their father ; and there never was a better bargain driven. Like people, like priest, quoth Hosea ; and, sighed Jeremiah, my people love to have it so. Mr. Broadley meant well, but his mind was too timid and slack, and his body too limp and loose, to fight the fog that rolled down the hill from West Thamesmouth. Instead he gave it back to them in vague high-sounding sermons, and in vague unexceptionable conversations that had no vice in them to injure anyone and, as surely, no virtue to heal. Like people, like priest ; lackaday !

This desire in Mr. Broadley to give his children what they expected of him was splendidly illustrated, to the quaking amusement of his curate, by the change which overcame his language whenever he felt the floor of a pulpit beneath his feet, or the hassock of a prayer-desk against his knees. Then the current speech of the Thamesmouth drawing-rooms became a marvellous blend that rolled along, in a muddy but glistening grandeur, of the English of the Bible, the English of the poets, and the English of the more ponderous journals. When in the full purple of prayer or exaltation, "to" became "unto" ; "understand" appeared as "comprehendeth" ; "meaning," for some reason, was extended into "meaning and significance" ; the King strutted as "Our Sovereign Lord and Monarch" ; Jesus moved sadly as "The Christ," "The Nazarene" ; trouble in the coalfields loomed up as "the dark clouds about us, O Lord, which menace the very fabric and structure of our civilization" ; and the questions of the day resounded through the church as "the fundamental issues that underlie our national life at this time."

His very pronunciation changed. "All," when Mr. Broadley was in high emotional state, showed a strange tendency to become "ull"—"Brethren, shall we ull now rise and sing a hymn" ; the holy Apostles, on the crest of a wave of very strong feeling, changed most distinctly into "Thy holy Aparcels, O Lord" ; God was one name or another, according as He appeared in direct or indirect vocation : for example, He was His recognizable Self in "O God, help us," but He had changed somehow when the high tide of Mr. Broadley's prayer broke

on the beach in a fine last wave of indirect appeal—as thus :
“ And now, of His great and abounding mercy, may Gud look down upon us and bless us.”

On the second Sunday of every month, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Broadley held a service which he called a “ People’s Service.” It was addressed to those who did not usually come to church ; the normal congregation not being accounted as of the People. In England, to be of the People, you must be weaker brethren, lax, fickle and unconverted ; you must be a formless multitude of creatures who live and browse outside the little clearing that parson or politician has made ; uncertain, coy and hard to please, you must be won, if won at all, by cajolery, titillation and bribes. The People’s Service at St. Wilfrid’s was a service of cajolery. Mr. Broadley, as he stood and addressed the People’s Service, was more genial than at any other time. He perspired with geniality. He ensured that all the prayers and hymns were of a “ popular ” character—though God knows what that means. He—but unfortunately the People were not at their service ; not a dozen of them. The congregation was made up of loyal parishioners who were anxious to help the Vicar in this worthy attempt to catch the People. Those sad desiccated virgins who attended all his services were there, sprinkled as lonely units among the naked pews ; some of the old men were there, seating their lonely selves, after a curious fashion, near the companionship of a pillar ; a few of the pious youths were there, dotted among the corner seats, of which so many were available ; the lads of Mr. Brewer’s Bible Class formed a goodly block in the front pews which the mere individuals were too shy to occupy ; Miss Pocock, all archness shed and a portentous solemnity indued, led in a necklace of Friendly or Rescued Girls ; and some of the sidesmen—usually it is to be feared, the more officious of them—walked up and down the aisles, ready to extend a hearty welcome to the People, should any of the coy creatures come.

About a month after his arrival in Thamesmouth, and for the first time, Tony was the Special Preacher at the People’s Service. The cajolery of the service had begun a week earlier ; it had blossomed into double-crown posters on the railings of the church which advertised “ Special Preacher, Rev. Antony O’Grogan, B.A., D.S.O.” ; and in smaller bills which drooped among the provisions in the shop windows. And now at five

minutes to three on the Sunday the Special Preacher, already robed in surplice and scarf, looked from the vestry door, down the spaces of the church, to see in what strength the People had come to hear him. A soft sunlight streamed from the lancet windows on to an empty south aisle, but in the body of the church, between the arcaded pillars, a considerable congregation was assembling. He detected quite a score of unfamiliar faces. And all the old friends were there: the faithful women, the lonely greybeards, the pious youths, Mr. Brewer and his lads, Miss Pocock and her girls. They had come to hear what the likeable new curate would make of his opportunity in the large freedoms of a People's Service. Alderman Scrase was not there, since he was emphatically not of the People; nor Mrs. Scrase either, since she was, or was not, whatever her husband was, or was not. But Mr. Bray moved ingratiatingly up and down the nave and showed the few strangers into pews.

Tony was about to turn back into the vestry and report to the Vicar within, when he heard the shuffle of many feet and the murmur of many voices at the west door. The faces of all the congregation swung round to this noise; and Mr. Bray hastened rapidly, but on soft feet, to meet it. It sounded as if some of the People were coming in.

The first to come in was Joe Wylie. He was tidier and cleaner than Tony had ever seen him, except in that photograph on his mantelshelf. He wore a black suit carefully brushed, and held a new bowler hat in his hand. His hair was oiled down and the ends of his moustache were waxed. Probably through embarrassment at where he was, and at the thought of his disciples crowding behind him, he wore a grin of exaggerated unconcern and swaggered a little as he marched up the nave. To Mr. Bray, who met him, and beckoned him to come forward, he said "Yuss" rather too loud. He whispered audibly to a grinning companion at his side that, gaw! it was Mr. Bray, the grocer in George Street. And he swaggered after this guide, brushing his moustache as he came.

Immediately behind Joe Wylie, but with no such uneasy swagger—indeed with some stateliness, as one who would have you know that she was well up in this church-going business—came Mrs. Tib Wylie, attired as if for a coster's wedding. Her hair, above all this fine and feathery grandeur, seemed more golden than ever. She held an umbrella aslant

her arm, and a Bible, prayer book and hymn-book in her gloved fingers. And the expression she carried through the watching people was more solemn than that of Miss Pocock herself.

Behind this forging galleon, which clearly flew the admiral's flag, whatever Joe Wylie may have imagined about his captaincy, came a fine flotilla of working men, some in ill-fitting dark clothes, some in coarse brown suits and week-day mufflers, and all with sheepish grins. Some had their wives with them, and one wife had a baby. Face after face Tony recognized as that of a man of the old Fifteenth, and his heart quickened. It melted. Mr. Bray, more impressed by this approach of the People than by anything that had happened in the church for many a long day, ushered Joe Wylie with a fat hand that was eloquent with brotherhood into the front pew of all; and Joe said "Yuss," and pushed along it. That he should forget that hassocks lay in the path to trip him proved that this was the first time that he had been to church for years; and that he should exclaim "Crikey!" as he stumbled over the first of them, and then allow a suppressed giggle to escape through his nose, proved that he had all the correct deportment to learn anew. The men behind him, in their embarrassment, tittered, and this made Joe still more inclined to laugh, so that he passed his fingers under both wings of his moustache to conceal the twisting of his mouth. Mrs. Wylie looked severe, and one felt that she was longing to say aloud, "Don't be a fool, Joe. Be'aive yerself, can't yer?" Joe sat down at the far end of the pew against a pillar, put his bowler hat under his seat, brushed both wings of his moustache again, and sat back to show that he was perfectly at home and at ease. The other men, not knowing any better, lounged into the rest of the pew and filled up the four pews behind, like a school of shepherded children. Mr. Bray, having seen his flock into these pews, pushed home his cuffs, buttoned his coat over a breast and bowels that were satisfied, and walked back to his place at the west door. And the children of the flock, left unshepherded, sat tightly together and tried, like their bell-wether, Joe Wylie, to appear at home and at ease.

But then Tib, knowing more about these matters than the rest, discomposed them all by kneeling on a hassock to say a preliminary prayer. At once some of the others, seeing that the admiral's flag had dipped and desiring to do everything

in order, followed her example—outwardly at least. And then all their fellows, rather than be left conspicuously alone, with people kneeling on either side of them, sank likewise to their knees. Joe, who had turned round to ascertain what might mean this general collapse of his followers, hastily bent himself forward and remained in this position till Tib gave the sign for a concerted movement backward. When Tib rose refreshed and began to play with the laces about her bosom or pass her fingers under her hair, he straightened his back and brushed his hand along his moustache to show that he was quite unashamed at anything he might have done. He examined a grease stain on the lapel of his coat and tried to brush it away with his sleeve, but, achieving little success, dipped his forefinger in his mouth and wiped it off that way. He sniffed rather loudly, and quite without malicious intent, but Tib turned and looked reprovingly at him, and that made him want to laugh. He stifled the laugh, shifted uneasily in his seat, and opened a hymn-book: while a humorist in the rear muttered, "Nah then! Smarten up in front there!" and the men near him giggled; which brought round the head of Joe, who, as the guardian of decency, hissed at them: "Shurru!"

Tony, at the vestry door, now became aware that the Vicar was by his side, watching with no little surprise this arrival of the People.

"Some of your friends, O'Grogan?" he inquired, when the vestry door had closed on them.

"Yes. The old Fifteenth."

"Excellent!" said the Vicar, throwing his scarf over his surplice. "Excellent. Some of Our Returned Men. Shall we just——"

And he began the vestry prayer. The Amen mumbled, the two clergy walked out of the vestry towards their stalls in the choir. The trained members of the congregation in the hinder seats rose to their feet with some little noise; and all Joe Wylie's platoon, as one man, turned their heads to see what was afoot in the rear. Tib stood up proudly, thus giving them their lead ("How the hell," said Joe afterwards, "could the rest form platoon?"), and they all stood with her, some leaning forward upon the pew as if faintly ashamed.

Mr. Broadley was now in the Vicar's stall, and Tony in the curate's opposite him. Mr. Broadley, after coughing, knelt

to pray. The trained members knelt to pray too ; but Joe's crowd, unaware that there was prayer behind, just sat themselves down again. Presently the Vicar stood up, and, facing the congregation, swept all of them, old friends and new, with never such a genial smile. And he cleared his throat and said :

“ Shall we ull rise and sing hymn one hundred and sixty-six ? ”

Mr. Broadley was not a little proud of the extempore prayers which he introduced into the People's Service. It was a somewhat bold and unorthodox step, he would say, but it had more Reality for the People, who would not be accustomed to the formal collects and prayers. If it offended a few of the strait-laced, well, he must be content to offend them, if thereby he might win the People. So now, the hymn over and all on their knees, he upraised his eyes to the roof, and proceeded to introduce a little Reality into the service.

“ O God our Father,” he prayed, “ look down upon us gathered together this Sunday afternoon to worship Thee and to seek Thy help in all the ills that beset us and our national life at this time . . . whether industrial . . . social . . . political . . . economic. Thou seest us, O Lord ; Thou lookest down upon us and seest us. And Thou understoodst . . . ”

Mr. Broadley in extempore rhapsodies always experienced some difficulty with verbs in the second person singular.

“ Let us first ask of Thee help and assistance in our social life . . . at this time. Keep far from us Industrial strife, O Lord ; help all of us, whether employers or employed, masters or men, rulers or ruled, mistresses or maid servants ”—he became quite sing-song—“ to do the work beneath our hand, not as unto men, but as unto Thee. Thus alone shall we achieve content, O Lord, realizing that, since we are sinners and merit nothing, all that we receive of the good things of this life comes from Thy gracious and forgiving bounty, and is more than we deserve. Such a—such a view was never more needed among our people than at this time, when our beloved land is threatened with industrial conflict, brother taking up the sword against brother and forgetting that they fought side by side, shoulder to shoulder, in the Great War,

so recently concluded. This is not according to Thy Will, O Lord. Thou willedst not that we strive one with another, but that we dwell together in unity, striving to bring Thy Kingdom about in this our beloved country—to build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land. Thou hast richly blest this our nation, lifting it to a great place among the peoples of the world, and recently thou hast brought it out of great tribulation, wherein its very existence was threatened, O Lord. We thank Thee for this Thy abounding mercy, and we pray Thee to help us to be worthy of our England, this sceptred isle, this royal throne of Kings, this little gem set in a silver sea. Do Thou help us, one and all, to be equal—*adequate*, O Lord—to this great hour in our country's history; do Thou help us to seek not our own ends, but to consider the whole community and to strive to understand the issues which underlie our national life at this time. That is what we need. Service, not self. Each of us has their own work in front of us"—“each,” like the second person singular, was very apt to entangle the feet of Mr. Broadley—“grant that we do it, not for the profit that it will bring us, but for its own sake. Drive far from us all thoughts of profit, so that we make The Thing before us, not for any such vulgar rewards, but only that it should be well done. Help us to make it for its own sake—for the sake of the Thing Itself. *The Thing Itself*, O Lord our God! And if, even then, we fail of our perfect mark, grant that we be able to say with Robert Browning in his famous poem ‘Rabbi Ben Ezra’:

‘Not on the vulgar mass,
Called “work,” must sentence pass,
But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
This I was worth to God . . .

or even as Bernard Shaw, a very different writer, says elsewhere: ‘This is the true joy of life, to spend yourself in the service of a great ideal.’ These men, whatever else they may have said—and there is much of their Written Word to which as Christian men and women we can never subscribe—but when they speak like this, O Lord, they speak as Thy Prophets.”

At this point the Vicar suspected, what Tony had perceived long before, that his words were ceasing to be a prayer to God and were becoming an address to the people. Not to say an

essay in literary criticism. So he hastily recovered his true orientation ; and in his ensuing words explained to God, and to the People, that he had not really gone astray.

“ Here are we, O Lord, Thy Church, gathered in prayer at Thy feet, realizing that we have a great part to play in our national life. We are seeking Thy help in this matter. We desire to ask Thee to help us, as a Church, to guide and influence the nation aright. And now, having considered our social duties, let us consider our personal lives, O Lord. And here what we all need so sorely is, as we saw earlier, that we should abandon the pursuit of all selfish ends, and live only to serve. Naught for self, and all for others. Thou camest among us to show us the way——”

Having quite forgotten that he had begun by addressing God the Father, he was now in the full tide of a prayer to God the Son.

“ It is Thy spirit, O Lord, that we need so much at this time ; the spirit of The Christ. In all our relations one with another, as husbands, as wives, as fathers, as little children, help us to remember always that the only happiness is giving. Help us to say Not I, but Her . . . but Him . . . but Them . . . May this be especially the case in our relations with our children, our little ones, on whom the future of our country depends.”

Never so successful when in rapture about the personal life as when in rapture about the national life, Mr. Broadley had safely footed his way back to that easier forest where the roads were so much broader and the long ruts of previous orators were all ready for his feet to tread. He prayed for Our Sovereign Lord the King, our statesmen and ministers, our soldiers, sailors and airmen, our nursing sisters and all who minister to the sick and dying. A pleasant and familiar rut led him to our municipal life, and he expounded to God the duties of all his listeners as units in the corporate life of our burrow. Then, after lowering his eyes from Heaven to his wrist-watch, he received the happiest of his inspirations. He upraised his eyes again and prayed for Tony.

“ And now, O Lord, do thou look upon him who shall speak to us in this quiet afternoon hour. Do Thou endue him with wisdom and power that he may touch and quicken our languid hearts. He is one whom Thou hast brought out of a Great Experience, with his life, and not without distinction. He has served on many fronts of the Great War. As a

combatant officer——” Wearying a little, he suffered his prayer to sag down into a chairman’s introduction of the speaker——“he has suffered for many years by the side of his men, and he knows that nothing will heal the wounds of our stricken world save Love, and the Gospel of the Nazarene. So he has elected to become Thy minister and servant, and now he will speak to us. Do Thou pour Thy grace upon him that he be but a vehicle of Thy truth. Do Thou charge him with a Message”——Mr. Broadley was recovering the afflatus——“so that out of the abundance of his heart the mouth may speak. And do Thou give to us all open hearts and listening ears that we may be greatly profited and go out from our midst into our daily labours, enriched . . . strengthened . . . fortified . . . purified . . . blessed. Amen, O Lord. . . . Amen”——and on the full-flowing river of his emotion, Mr. Broadley was carried to two more Amens. “Amen. . . . Amen.”

He rose and faced the people, the richness of his prayer still mellowing him like wine. And in this mellow mood he smiled and said :

“Shall we ull rise and sing hymn five hundred and forty ? ”

Tony had been listening to the Vicar’s prayer in amazement and delight. As the wordy stream flowed on, now muddy, now clear, now breaking over some awkward rocks, now pouring towards God the Father, now divagating towards God the Son, now spreading out in a flood over its audience in the pews, he had been hard put to it to control the laugh that trembled beneath his surplice and cassock. But gradually the laughter became irritation. His eyes turned towards Joe Wylie and his flock. He knew them well. Simple people, and always impressed by fluent and sonorous speech, they were satisfied that the clergyman’s prayer was beautiful, and were not attending. Joe was using the long tedious interval as an opportunity for cleaning his teeth with a match-end. Tib, resting her round face in the cup of her hands, while her mouth drooped, was using the time to brood over the worries of her household. Often she put her fingers into her golden hair and lifted its weight, and her hat’s weight, off a weary head. The mother with the baby was dandling it up and down because it showed a tendency itself to break into ejaculatory prayer. The other

men and women were lolling forward and filling up their boredom with varied occupations; some fiddling with the hymn-books, some trimming their nails, and some day-dreaming. Pity blent with Tony's irritation. Were the Vicar's woolly generalizations to be all that the People's Service could give to these simple folk who had come, so richly bedight, to hear what it might be that the spokesmen of God were eager to say? No: he himself must redress the balance. He must mount that pulpit and introduce a little Reality into the service.

He put his hand into his cassock pocket and drew out the notes of his sermon. They were many, and closely written; for Tony, not yet accustomed to preaching, liked to feel that at least ninety per cent. of his actual words were available, in an emergency, beneath his eyes. Moreover, he had conned the larger part of them by heart; and for this reason they suddenly seemed wooden and lifeless. Oh, why couldn't he pour out, naturally, easily, and with the vehemence of conviction, some truth that all his blood and heart endorsed? *Was* there anything that he believed like that? Yes—oh, yes—for years it had possessed him: it had entered his heart, bringing its sorrow with it, that day when Peggy went out of his life on the arm of Michael Saffery, her husband; it had risen like a flood in him that day when the glorious pageantry of the Desert Column marched forward to the capture of El Arish; it had broken him that day when he knelt in the Dangerous Ward of No. 201, by the side of his dying men—the certainty that nothing mattered quite so much in life as sweet human relationships; that the more you had of them the better; that all the other things men desired—fame, and wealth, and comfort—were of little worth if these were missing; and that you simply couldn't have them unless you yourself were capable of giving largely of yourself. You might want and want and want, but you would only get back what you gave. This was what, in some way or another, he would bring out of his heart and force across to Joe Wylie and his friends. Ideas and arguments leapt into mind. Some of them, so vigorous they were, would offend the Vicar and the old congregation, but it couldn't be helped. The attack was going to begin.

Hurriedly, while the Vicar babbled on, and while the hymn was being sung, he pencilled words and sentences on the back of his notes. And he prayed to be helped.

The hymn was in its last verse; the Vicar, still impressed by his prayer and very happy, was singing it at the top of his voice, and the curate was mounting the pulpit with an angry resolve to bring a little Reality into the service.

The Amen died away, and the people sat down.

It would be impossible to give a verbatim report, or even a coherent précis, of Tony's sermon that Sunday afternoon. He himself could never remember the words which he used, nor the sequence of his arguments; he knew only that the whole sermon was vilely phrased and vilely organized, but that, if it had neither form nor dignity, it had passion. He knew that all the faces of Joe Wylie's company stared up at him; that Miss Pocock stared; that Mr. Bray stared; and that the Vicar stared, as well he might—for inasmuch as the Vicar's prayer (or exhortation or discussion or whatever the extraordinary compost might be called) was the last thing his curate had heard, and inasmuch as his curate was now speaking extempore and hotly, the sermon in more than one place spluttered into a vigorous denial of some point which the Vicar had explained with much beauty to God. Well might the Vicar gape.

Tony, up there in his pulpit, was conscious all the time of two Tonys: one, a hurt poet who was pouring out a maddening conviction that nothing counted in the long run but love; and the other, a little seated watcher within him who was at once impishly delighted and nervously alarmed at the shocking indiscretions of his friend the poet.

He heard himself declare that the only way the Church could help the national life was by working revolutions in individual souls. And thereupon he heard himself attack the idea that "Naught for self and all for others" was the truth for most of his hearers this afternoon. If it were, why didn't he give up all that he'd got to the unemployed and walk barefoot through the streets of Thamesmouth? (And in this connexion he had reason to suppose that he became flippant.) For heaven's sake, he said, let them get out of a vapoury idealism on to the solid ground of reality. Some men were called to the extremes of self-sacrifice, and he bowed his head before them; they were the geniuses of sanctity, but nothing could make him believe that himself, or most of his hearers, were called to such heights as that. He would be perfectly honest with them and admit that he was going to keep his few stocks and shares, and his five per cent. dividends. No, it seemed clear to him that for

normal Christian men and women the true nobility was a happy harmony between self-preservation and self-giving, with the bias leaning always towards self-giving. The more the bias leant that way the better, no doubt. And that was what he was going to ask them to attempt: a steady increase, day by day, of the bias towards giving. Take an example: if an industrial conflict arose, they might be doing quite right in not allowing themselves to be exploited, if they were convinced that their masters would only take advantage of too much self-abnegation; but let them go about it with more than half an eye on the good of their fellows.

Many other distressing things did Tony say. He said: "And don't think all the time that you're such damned fine fellows. You'll begin to look like damned fine fellows when you begin to say, 'Well, I'm not sure that *I'm* much to write home about, but my mates are good lads and deserve better treatment, so I'm standing in with them.'" He said: "And I always reckon, myself, that it's a dangerous thing to say that the only happiness is in giving, not in receiving. Christ had far too much sense to put it like that. He did not say that there was no happiness in receiving; He said it was happier to give than to receive. Of *course* it's a happy thing to receive, a perfectly delightful thing—I love it—but it's happier—oh, so much happier—such wonderful happiness, when you really see the truth of it, to *give*. My God, if we could only produce as far as we can, throughout our lives, that joy which comes when we give something to a friend, why, we should really be joyous from the cradle to the grave! And that brings me again to my everlasting point, that nothing, nothing, *nothing* matters very much when the years are passing away from you except human relationships, or in a sweeter word, love. That's all I want to get into you this afternoon. If you've accepted that—and every one of you knows in his secret heart that it's blindingly true; and if you are making up your minds as you sit here and listen to me, that, oh! you'll do something about it! why, then, you are not far from the Kingdom of God. Oh, *do* do something about it! I am offering the choice between a wretched, drifting loneliness that will not bear thinking of, and joys that can be almost too great to be borne. If you make the wrong choice you are not so much sinners as fools. Fools to choose a hell of loneliness instead of a heaven

of love! And you build your heaven about you just in proportion as you give. I know this is not the whole truth, and that I've said it all atrociously; but it's quite a lot of the truth, and it'll do for this afternoon. Take it; take it, for God's sake, for your friends' sake, and lastly for your own sake. . . . God bless you, and come again next time."

Tony had finished—finished lovingly and angrily. He turned, wiped his forehead, and walked wearily, stumbling once, down the stairway of the pulpit.

The Vicar rose in his stall, and turned towards the people. A sad man, he inquired of them sadly:

"Well; and shall we ull sing hymn one hundred and ninety-three?"

When they were back in the vestry the Vicar's silence was oppressive. As he threw off scarf, hood and surplice, his resentment and confusion seemed to hang like a damp aura round his head. And Mr. Bray and a sidesman, as they counted the money in the collection plate, were oppressively silent too. As for Tony, he was both pleased and perturbed; pleased to think that he had forced out of his heart something that was good, and perturbed to remember that more than once, in that effervescent discourse, he had been tactless, fretful and unmannerly. Mr. Bray and the sidesman departed, after a cold "good afternoon" to him, and a sympathetic—an excessively sympathetic—"good afternoon" to the Vicar. Tony began to whistle the last hymn to himself, to show that he was in his happiest vein to-day; and prepared to follow them; but the Vicar called out:

"Just a minute, O'Grogan."

"Yes, Vicar?" Tony's raised eyebrows suggested that he could imagine no reason why the Vicar should bid him pause.

"I *must* say, O'Grogan—I mean, I really can't—I mean, you must see that that sermon of yours was rather distressing to—to myself and to many others. It was not at all the sort of thing that I expected from you. Not at all. To begin with—to take a very small point—the slang and the slovenly expression! It's not good enough, O'Grogan! The Clergy of the Established Church, I always say, are, to a certain extent, the guardians of the King's English."

"Good lord! Are they?"

"Yes. Yes, certainly. But we'll leave that. What good do you think you are going to do by a wild, unprepared harangue like that? . . . It's not good enough, O'Grogan. . . . I'll guarantee you've offended a great many people, and we don't want to offend anybody."

"I should think it would do some of them good," said Tony.

"Please let me finish. You must have offended the old members of the congregation, and you went out of your way, I thought, to abuse those—those new friends of ours sitting in front. I can't see what's gained by it."

"Only that it may be damned good for their souls."

"There! I don't think that words like 'damned good' are suitable to the House of God. It's *not* good for them to be offended and driven away; we should treat them with infinite gentleness, so as to hold them, and then——"

"Excuse me, Vicar: I have met one padre in my life who was successful with men like them—a fellow called Quickshaw—and he knew that the last thing they want is to be buttered——"

"'Buttered'! . . ."

"Yes; flattered—oiled. Instead, he just told them what he thought of them in their own language, putting plenty of kick into it—and by their own language I mean their whole mode of thinking, which is bitter on the surface and quite soft underneath—and they trusted him for an honest man and an intelligible one, and not only listened to him, but quite often got busy and did what he told them——"

"Yes, well, we don't want any methods like that here. I hope we shan't quarrel, O'Grogan, but if we are to work amicably together, we must understand each other."

"Which means, Vicar, not only that I must understand you, but that you must understand me."

"Eh, what? Yes: to a certain extent, yes." Mr. Broadley did not seem sure that it meant that. "But I am the captain of this ship, and the sooner we are clear about that the better. You must leave me to decide what sort of language I desire spoken in my pulpit, and what sort I won't tolerate."

Tony, walking up and down, strove to get a rein upon his temper by reminding himself that he was a tolerant fellow, much wiser than Broadley; and when he had got this pleasing bit between his teeth, he turned and said:

"All right, Vicar. I'm—I'm sorry if I lost control of my words once or twice—I think I did—but when I saw all those men in front, I abandoned the sermon I had prepared and tried to give them something for themselves. It wasn't easy, getting it all out on the spur of the moment."

Mr. Broadley was mollified. He liked everyone to be happy, and therefore could never bear that anyone should be apologizing to him.

"Thank you, O'Grogan," he said. "Thank you—er—I am sure that if you exercise just a little more moderation I shall find your language and your ideas quite unexceptionable."

They parted at the church gates, Tony going north up St. Wilfrid's Road, and Mr. Broadley south to his Vicarage. And, as Tony strode on, he grimaced at the future doubtfully. Some of the fat had already splashed into the fire; was it not inevitable that a whole spluttering panful should one day follow it?

CHAPTER IV

SUPPER AT THE SCRASES'

"**S**ANCTITY," thought Tony, standing on the pavement one day, after he had breathed several weeks of the pleasant St. Wilfrid's fog, "would enable a man to endure, or, failing sanctity, humour." And since in his case sanctity had not paraded its forces in any great strength as yet, and he doubted most heartily if it ever would do so, he had best mobilize all his reserves of humour. No doubt in an extreme Anglo-Catholic system, such as Peggy's, where there were rites which only a clergyman could perform, he could have been a fairly useful instrument and worth his pay; and in an extreme Anglo-Protestant system, with its stern taboos, he would have had a way of life to preach and to live; but in this formless atmosphere of St. Wilfrid's ("this Broadley-speaking Christianity," as he called it), God help us, he had need of extraordinary patiences if he were to breathe it, do an honest job, and be efficient. Wherefore, since sanctity was not on the horizon, fall in, laughter! Tony issued this order on a Monday morning, as he came away from a staff meeting at the Vicarage. There had been that in the staff meeting which provoked such thoughts.

But it is often easier to issue an order than to ensure that it is obeyed. Unfortunately there was a combative Irishman in Tony, who sat the same bench most inamicably with the man of patiences; and very often, before one could stop him, this Irishman had shouldered his wiser partner to the floor, and was up and arguing with the Vicar or some other offender. Not six days after the order had gone out—on the Sunday evening when Honor and he were bidden for supper to the Scrases'—the Irishman and the wise man were at issue again, the latter pulling the former down as fast as he stood up.

Tony and Honor arrived before the Vicar and Miss Pocock, who had also been bidden to the meal. They were shown in to the drawing-room, and Honor immediately sat down upon a sofa and apparently thought of nothing.

For a moment Tony, wearied with the day's work, felt unreasonably angry with her for sitting down and thinking of nothing. She should have cast her eyes around this remarkable drawing-room and drawn a hundred-and-one inferences from it. It was utterly untouched by any ideas that had visited the world in the last fifty years. It was unaware that the English were awake at last to a sense of colour and pattern and form. Look at its water-colours in gilt frames, its chairs and sofa in timid-hued cretonnes, its heavy brocade curtains and long lace ones, its grand piano covered with Indian shawls and silver-framed photographs, its tables, stools and knick-knacks, and its tall palm. One was intelligent in so far as every object in the world was a window through which one could see interesting or amusing significances, and unintelligent in so far as the windows had their blinds drawn. This room was full of windows. Was Honor a little unintelligent sometimes?

He suppressed a rebuke and wandered round the room, examining pictures and ornaments. Suddenly he paused before the mantelpiece and studied the photograph which corresponded to that in Joe Wylie's room. It had been framed in silver and elevated to the dignity of its own little easel. Across one corner of the frame was stretched the purple and white ribbon of the Military Cross.

"H'mmm," he murmured. "Honor."

"Yes, Tony?"

"This is Kit Scrase. Only, heavens! he looks so much younger here."

Honor jumped up to look at the portrait. She had heard such happy, glowing things of her husband's friend, Kit Scrase.

"Tony, what a beautiful face he's got!"

"Yes, I always thought his face was almost perfect—a perfect mixture of acute intelligence and natural charm, if you see what I mean. . . . How the deuce he managed to spring from this silly old couple——"

"*Sb!* Tony. . . . I think they're adorable, both of them. Mr. Scrase is a lamb."

"A mutton-headed old sheep, my dear. So's the dowager."

"P'r'aps so. But they're good and kind."

"Oh, yes, good, kind old sheep—up to a point. Though I don't see how stupid people can ever be really kind."

"But why?"

"Oh, well, they're always so cock-sure and intolerant. Only say something they don't agree with, and you're in for it. They shout you down; and at the back of their minds they wonder if you're not mentally deficient. Probably they half suspect that you're morally corrupt as well."

"But I thought you were always complaining because these people never disagreed with anyone?"

"The Scrases?"

"No; all the people here."

"The Scrases seldom disagree with anyone, because no one has the courage to provoke them."

"Yes, but the other people?"

Tony rumbled his hair at the sides, while he considered the other people.

"They agree with you because they never say what they sincerely think, but only what they think you will expect to hear."

"Well, isn't that nice of them?"

"Is it? I much prefer people who say with appalling sincerity what's in their minds. Then the talk begins."

"Oh, I don't! I like the nice, insincere people. They're always so much more restful."

She had said it lightly, and it was a natural enough remark; and Tony was a fool to let it press upon the old wound. He stopped the sigh of a fool, and said:

"Hush, hush! Here are your lambs."

Mr. and Mrs. Scrase came in; and as Tony shook hands with his host, he was thinking that he certainly had a very fine narrow head and his fleece was excellent. Mr. Scrase had exchanged the morning coat for a square-cut jacket of black velvet, but otherwise he still wore the uniform that duty demanded: striped trousers, patent boots, high stiff collar and big black tie. And his little quiet old lady matched him, in her black silk gown trimmed with white, her golden chains and her sparkling rings.

"The Vicar will be with us shortly," said the Alderman.

"And Miss Pocock," added his wife.

"Yes," conceded Mr. Scrase, who had not thought Miss Pocock worthy of a special mention.

"Yes, we asked Miss Pocock to come along too," explained Mrs. Scrase.

They all sat down, and a dull talk flitted from chair to chair. In answer to some respectful questions from the curate, Mr. Scrase published a series of heavy pronouncements, and Mrs. Scrase, if appealed to, echoed them. Honor spoke hardly at all. Then, quite unwittingly, Tony gave the conversation life by alluding to the portrait of Kit. This seemed to touch the mother's lips as with a live coal from the altar; and she shed her subordination and became the chief talker. Her husband left the floor to her, sitting with his hands on his knees and nodding an occasional endorsement of her praises, or staring sadly in front of him. It was curious: Kit being the subject, the echo changed places with its principal; the mother talked and talked of the dead boy, while the father sat still, only answering his wife's, "Isn't that so, Christopher?" with a "Yes, my dear," or "Yes . . . yes, always." The mother was so full of her subject, and it was flowing out of her so gently and happily, that she seemed almost distressed at its interruption when the Vicar and Miss Pocock entered.

Mr. Broadley, having no idea that he had broken the happy flow of Mrs. Scrase, rubbed his hands together and was hearty.

"Aha! Another day's work done! Well, O'Grogan, I always think Sunday evening's the best evening in the week, don't you?"

But why? Tony saw no reason why Sunday evening should be a better evening for the Vicar than any other evening of the week. Unless, to be sure, Sunday was the only day when the Vicar did eight hours' work and rested at eventide. But that wasn't what Mr. Broadley had meant. He had meant to suggest that seven days of fierce, unremitting labour had now reached their culmination, and one could enter a little valley of peace before another fierce week began. What was the sense of serving up such unreal stuff to his curate, who *knew*, who knew that, if it were not for the committees, conferences, and public meetings which Mr. Broadley enjoyed as much as a boy enjoys his games, he would have been at a loss how to fill up the hours between Monday morning and Saturday night? When would Mr. Broadley perceive that his curate wasn't blind?

"Yes, I think it is a good evening," said Tony.

"Oh, I *love* Sunday evening," gushed Miss Pocock, and

executed a little skip and dance. "I don't know why it is, but I always feel exceptionally lively on Sunday evenings. I suppose it's a naughty little reaction after so much solemnity. Do you feel like that, Mr. O'Grogan? I believe you do!" She pointed at him an arch, accusing finger. "Yes, I believe you do! You look so thoroughly mischievous."

"Well, shall we all go down to supper?" said Mr. Scrase.

"Yes, I've no great quarrel with that suggestion," agreed the Vicar. "In fact, I think it's an excellent suggestion, don't you, O'Grogan?"

"Yes, I think we're all here," said Mrs. Scrase, who was not easily jocose.

"And you'll have to forgive me if I eat rather largely," added the Vicar, rubbing his hands together again. "I am quite hungry after the day's work."

Miss Pocock gently touched his arm and guided him to the door. "Was he hungry, poor darling? He shall be fed."

There was no doubt that Miss Pocock was in the best of spirits. She looked back at Honor and Tony, and called: "Come along, people. Let's all be thoroughly greedy. Do let's."

"Ah, the sweet thing!" whispered Tony to Honor, who giggled; and they all went down to the dining-room.

About the Scrases' dining-room there was a heavy brownness. The colours in the carpet all blent to brown; the colours in the curtains all blent to brown; the wallpaper was of a red that feared to be itself and approximated to brown; the pictures on the walls were brown engravings. Nowhere was there a primary colour. The Scrases banished primary colours as rather violent and vulgar things; and probably they were quite unaware that the inheritors of a new world were experimenting with bright paint and finding it cheerful. If they had been told that there were respectable householders to-day whose furniture was pillar-box red or bird's-egg blue, they would have been scandalized, and have affirmed that their rooms must look like the vestibule of a cinema; and, in saying this, they would have supposed that they had condemned the rooms for ever. It would not have occurred to them that the vestibule of a cinema might be a much more cheerful place, and even a much more artistic one, than their own brown dining-room.

Similarly, their table was laid in an old fashion, its cut glass

and massive silver standing on a shining cloth of Irish linen. An obsequious manservant, and a maid in a black dress and white apron, waited near the huge brown sideboard. A huge glass-fronted bookcase, filled with bound volumes of *Blackwood's*, *Punch* and William Black's novels, looked down upon the loaded table. It was a room that reminded Tony of his childhood and a Kensington that was dead.

The Alderman put Honor on his right and Miss Pocock on his left; and his wife took the Vicar to her right and Tony to her left.

"That puts husband and wife together," giggled Miss Pocock. "They mustn't quarrel. And I shall have the Vicar. Come along, Vicar-man."

Over the soup, Mrs. Scrase took up again the subject of her boy. She described to Tony the appalling hardships of his life on the Gallipoli peninsula—how for eight months he had got no respite from gunfire, and the flies had simply covered his food, and all the water had tasted horrid, and the smallest cuts and sores on his hands had always gone septic—and never once did her imagination suggest to her that this Mr. O'Grogan, who had been an officer of the same company as Kit, had endured precisely the same afflictions as he. Somewhat chafed by this dullness, Tony did once say, "Yes, I know. I was there;" but she looked at him and did not seem at all convinced that this young clergyman sitting in her chair could have suffered all that Kit suffered. So she went on to tell Tony all about the evacuation of Gallipoli. These were the years just after the war, when talkers, having got on to that inexhaustible subject, did not leave it for the rest of the evening. And one remark of hers was indeed a window through which he could see the real Mrs. Scrase, and her inability, despite all, to conceive what the war had been.

"You know, Mr. O'Grogan," she said, "I don't like to think it of our rulers, but I feel that they published quite a lot of untruths about that evacuation. Once when Kit was here on leave, my husband said how wonderful it was that they should have got all those men off the Peninsula without a single casualty, and Kit said, 'Is that the official story they published?' and when we said yes, he looked quite angry and—you must forgive me using the word—he said, 'Well, it was a damned lie.' And Kit wasn't usually a swearing boy."

Unwisely Tony burst into a laugh. "Was that all he said?"

"Oh, but Kit was never a swearing boy," Mrs. Scrase repeated earnestly.

"No." Tony, recovering his wisdom, allowed her to believe it.

"No; he always had too much good taste for that. And I don't believe, myself, that bad language was characteristic of the majority of our men either. All the officers that I met seemed to be exceedingly quiet and well-bred young men. And the privates too."

"Of course!" This was a gun from the Alderman, who, hearing his wife's words, opened fire from his end of the table. His wife had reminded him of a scandal that he loved to silence, so he proceeded to tell Tony the real facts about the men at the front. "It's perfectly scandalous the deliberate attempt that people are making now to represent our men as a set of foul-mouthed blasphemers. They were nothing of the sort. They were as quiet and orderly an army as ever took the field. The British Army was, in my judgment, an army of gentlemen."

Nobody likes to be informed authoritatively about matters on which he thinks himself an expert; and certainly not the Irishman in Tony, who was pricked at once to utterance.

"But they *were* foul-mouthed and blasphemers," he said. "You may not like to think it, but they were."

"*Chut*," snapped the Alderman.

"That isn't to say you're not right, on the whole, when you call them an army of gentlemen. I agree; and, in fact, it's rather a favourite point of mine; isn't it, Honor? But I don't see why they shouldn't be both."

"But that's nonsense," insisted the Alderman. "No gentleman is ever foul-mouthed. And blasphemy is unthinkable to him. Isn't that so, Vicar?"

"Of course," stuttered the Vicar. "Certainly. . . . Yes, thank you, Mrs. Scrase, I *will* have a little more. . . . But I think I see what O'Grogan means."

"I don't," assured Mr. Scrase. "If a man's foul-mouthed, he's not a gentleman, and there's an end of it. At all costs let's be logical."

"Oh——" Tony was just going to say, "Oh, hell!" but saved himself in time. "I don't want to shock you all, but I beg leave to state that I used some very obscene language in the army——"

"Oh, you naughty man!" interjected Miss Pocock.

"—and, what's more, I frequently blasphemed. We all did."

Miss Pocock could not laugh at this.

"I hardly knew a man who didn't; and it didn't seem to matter very much."

"Not *matter*?" echoed Mrs. Scrase. "Not *matter*, Mr. Grogan? Don't the commandments of God matter? 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain'—can you get away from that?"

"Oh——" began Tony impatiently, but he rumped his hair, and got control of himself again. "Oh, but—I dunno—honestly, Mrs. Scrase, if you'd had to flounder through mud with ninety pounds of equipment on your back, and the rain pouring down your neck, and a gas-mask pinching your nose and shells bursting all round you, I believe *you'd* have sworn. It's not the swearing that's to blame but the war that caused it."

"The war was a righteous war," boomed the Alderman. "Will you have a little cold beef, or a little cold turkey, Vicar? If ever there was a righteous war in history, the one just concluded was it. Bring me the steel, Jenkins; this knife is blunt as usual. It seems to be the fashion now, not only to throw mud at our splendid men, but to besmirch the cause for which they died."

"Ah, no, surely not," protested the Vicar. "O'Grogan wasn't saying that."

"No, no," breathed Miss Pocock.

"Not O'Grogan, perhaps. But that is what much of this pacifist talk amounts to." He began to sharpen his knife, and, raising his eyes from the task, stared, unseeing, at something beyond that room and far away. "And I submit, if you will pardon my mentioning it, that such a contention is an insult to those of us who gave our all."

The Vicar mumbled some sympathy; Mrs. Scrase touched her eyes with a handkerchief; and Miss Pocock directed her eyes to her plate, where she was using her knife as delicately as an artist uses a pencil.

"My boy was all in all to us," continued the speaker, now carving the turkey, "but I say here and now that I do not regret having been asked to give him up for my country's sake, because I believe, and I shall always believe, that I gave him to a good cause."

"That is certain, Scrase," said the Vicar softly.

"Yes . . . oh, yes," murmured Miss Pocock.

Tony said nothing. The words, "Did your Kit approve of the war?" had come near his lips, but he held them back. And not only because he had a real admiration for the simple probity of his host, but also because there hung around the memory of his dead friend an atmosphere of quiet sacredness which could always touch him to wisdom. He withdrew into himself and into thoughts of the past; and suddenly he remembered Kit saying after a dazzling argument under the Gallipoli stars: "I never argue with my people at home: it's no good hurting them, so perhaps that's why I work it off on you, old man."

All seemed to have tacitly agreed that the conversation had best move away from the ghost of Kit Scrase.

"No," said the father. "No. Nothing can reason me out of my conviction that our army, on the whole, was an army of Christian gentlemen."

"And I should be the last to attempt to do so, sir," said Tony. "It's probable, however, that I interpret your terms differently. Let me tell you a story that'll justify my meaning further. May I, sir?"

The Alderman spread an assenting hand.

"Well, what I am trying to say is that the moral law is relative, and in conditions like those of Gallipoli or France we could not condemn the men for blasphemy and we might even applaud them for stealing——"

"*Stealing?*" echoed Mrs. Scrase.

"Yes; only we didn't call it 'stealing'; we called it 'lifting.' And it wasn't one another's property that we lifted, but the Government's. The men lifted that whenever they could, and I suggest that they were often right."

"I cannot feel that stealing is justified ever—ever," said Mrs. Scrase.

"Well, hear my story. Once when our Company headquarters was in Leigh Ravine on Gallipoli, and our dug-outs were dotted all down the slope of the bluff, a very young subaltern called O'Connor joined us. It was just after the Great Blizzard had burst over the Peninsula, and the snow, I remember, was driving in his face as he came up the track to report to head-quarters. I am afraid we were all too frozen to look after him, so we told him to make himself a dug-out and call again in the morning. You see, there was no war

on Gallipoli while the blizzard was raging; it had just frozen hard. So young O'Connor trudged off, and, as he was much too new to steal for the good of his country, he dug himself the most miserable little hole instead of a proper dug-out, and covered it with his single ground-sheet to keep out the snow and the icy wind. Needless to say, he was very quickly soaked to the bone and chilled to the marrow. Then our Padre came along, to visit a new-comer—and Padre Quickshaw, I must tell you, was the most—oh, well, but we'll leave that—and when he saw this poor little shivering rat of an O'Connor, he called him all sorts of names and demanded why he didn't at once lift some ground-sheets from the Quartermaster's stores and some wooden beams from the Sapper's Dump, and so preserve himself from pneumonia for the good of his country. He said, 'You little idiot! You'll never have such a chance in your life as you've got now. All the Dump wallahs are frozen, or they've got their heads under about six blankets. Go and take what you want.' The boy said he didn't like to, so Quickshaw said 'Pooh!' and disappeared. In about half an hour he returned with four new ground-sheets under one arm, and a bale of sandbags under another, and a fine beam in each hand; and he tossed these down in front of the youth, and said, 'There! Make yourself a proper dug-out, and don't be a bloody fool.'"

The adjective shivered the room. At the last moment Tony, as an artist, had been quite unable to spoil his story by omitting it.

"I am only telling you what he actually did say," he apologized, "and he was a padre."

"I don't think anything can justify stealing," repeated Mrs. Scrase.

Now there is something inordinately vexing in coming up against the buffers like this, just when you think that you have put up a most cogent piece of argument. Impatience surged in Tony, but he would have mastered it, had not Mrs. Scrase at that instant turned and spoken to Honor.

"You agree with me, don't you, Mrs. O'Grogan? You agree that stealing must be a sin, in any circumstances whatever. Surely?"

And Honor, either out of timidity or out of slackness, replied:

"It's certainly rather dangerous to think anything else."

This maddened him, and he was driven, for his own relief, to argue further.

"Well, lying?" he demanded, with a militant note. "What about lying? Doesn't the larger truth often require that we lie for the good of our country?"

This being certainly picturesque, the Alderman was prepared to pass it, as an examiner might pass a dubious but not wholly damnable candidate.

"It is just possible, I will admit, that in extreme cases one might have to lie for the national good. But not for individual good. No, that's the difference." He seemed quite pleased with his clear thinking. "We may sometimes speak an untruth to save the country from danger, but not, in my judgment, to save an individual from punishment or pain."

Tony glanced sharply at him; an involuntary glance, for these had been strange, rather terrible, words to come from Alderman Scrase. When he spoke again he knew that he had stepped on to treacherous ground, but, understanding his host and hostess, he felt sure that he was safe there. It was safest, perhaps, to speak like this.

"But, sir, take the case of men who were shot for cowardice—or something like that. The Army in its mercy reported that they were 'missing' or 'killed in action.' That was a lie to save the individual from pain. Do you suggest that it wasn't justified?"

Before he answered, the Alderman signalled to the manservant to remove the joint. Then, leaning stiffly back in his chair and holding the lapels of his velvet coat, he gave his judgment.

"I suppose I should do my best to keep such terrible information from the parents, but not to the extent of lying. No, in my judgment, you are starting on a very dangerous slope when you begin to play ducks and drakes with truth."

"And I quite agree with my husband," murmured Mrs. Scrase.

Tony said no more. The dining-room of the Scrases faded from his eyes, and he saw a cemetery spread in a meadow by the side of a white road. Between the grass and the metal of the road a line of Dutch poplars waved in the breeze, and somewhere a bird sang. Otherwise the level lands, stretching to the sky, seemed as if the afternoon light had drained them of sound. Eight men moved about a grave, five of whom were bearers of an alien regiment, one Padre Quickshaw, one Tony himself, and the last Joe Wylie. Near by, much interested

and perhaps a little ashamed, stood the Chaplain of the alien brigade, who had refused to bury Captain Scrase with the full rites of the Church. And it was into the face of this man, almost more than to any Presence on that lowland plain or above that lowland sky, that Quickshaw was muttering his angry prayers. "We thank Thee for the life and work of this our brother. We praise Thee for his high soul, faithful unto death . . ."

The mother of Kit Scrase dispersed this dream by asking him, in her gentle voice, which sweet he would prefer.

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CHAPTER V

A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POETRY AND PROSE

AS the weeks passed, carrying their Sundays with them, Tony remarked a new policy in his Vicar. Quietly, and speaking no hurtful word, Mr. Broadley was arranging that O'Grogan preached as seldom as possible. It was better that the congregation should not be disturbed by his unwise lucidity. Henceforward the morning and evening sermons on Sunday, which were all that mattered seriously, should be reserved to himself, the Vicar, and to staid and tactful old visiting preachers who could be trusted to be ambiguous. O'Grogan could take the Guild services on weekdays and the children's services on Sunday afternoons. His talks to the children could be as direct and new-fangled as he liked, because Alderman Scrase would not be there, nor Colonel Wilberforce, nor Mrs. Hammerton, nor any of those considerable members of the congregation whom it was wiser not to ruffle. Nor, of course, would the Vicar himself be there to hear anything which would make him unhappy. Some of the Sunday School teachers might be upset, but they, as a rule, were of a timid and amenable temper, and, anyhow, quite uninfluential, so they needn't cause one anxiety.

Tony made no comment on this new policy. While still a deacon he could claim no right to go into the pulpit; and the Vicar, in withholding any invitation to him to do so, was but taking the Prayer Book at its word. So he kept silence. But behind this silence indignation was simmering, and there were times when he felt as little like a man of God (who humbleth himself and is not puffed up) as it was possible to feel. If it had not been for a secret hope which was exciting him just now, he might have opened some lively controversies with the Vicar during the staff meetings.

But he was nursing a great hope, and could afford to wait. In a few weeks' time—on the last Saturday in October—Messrs. Aldo and Wright would publish his first book of poems. And if his great hope came true and the book made its little noise in the world, then Vicar, wardens and all his critics would have to open their eyes in amazement and sing a smaller song.

Only Honor, to whom for nights past he had been compelled to talk about the poems, and Peggy, who must always have confidences like this, knew of the great event. They knew, too, that he had paid Messrs. Aldo and Wright forty pounds towards the cost of production, but he did not choose to make this public, and he enjoined Honor and Peggy to keep the information to themselves. It didn't mean anything, really. It was nearly always done when a man published a first book of poems, but the silly people of West Thamesmouth, not knowing this, would say that he had published the book at his own cost, whereas the truth was that, if Messrs. Aldo and Wright had not thought very highly of the poems, they would have asked him to contribute eighty pounds, and perhaps more.

They were not many, these poems; but they were good—he could not doubt it. Nay, he was wildly sure of it. Into them he had distilled, with such stress, such loving labour, all the suffering that had been his, in thirty years. He had begun them fifteen years before when, as a boy, he had sipped for the first time that dreadful cup which henceforth would stand at his side for ever. The first of them was called, "Sybil by the Lake." There were poems that, as a young schoolmaster, he had walked with, in the lanes under Wolstonbury Down, reshaping them, polishing them, caressing them; for those were the days when, Frank Doyly having passed, he had drunk of the cup again. Then there was a poem on the death of a man's love for his bride; he had written it—and yes, he had sobbed as he wrote it—by the lamplight of his cottage at Albourne, in that year before the war, when love dimmed out, and the meaning went from beauty everywhere and all the shrines stood empty. There were war poems—these he believed the noblest of all—shaped one winter in his cellar at Nieuport, because Childe Harold, Jim Stott, Rosy Hughes and so many others had failed to parade on the sea-wall of La Panne. And through all, from the first of them to the last, the same two strains were heard: every man is alone; nothing is stable or endures. Farewell, old Family that used to be:

Father, Mother, Keatings, Joyce, Derek. Farewell, old war, quite faded now; the light is gone from the lantern that threw your phantasms on the screen, and I see now that your pains were nothing more than high lights in that insubstantial show. Farewell, Harold, Aylwin, Kit; good-night, Webster, Stott and Little Willie Sparrow. To what end our pleasant meeting? We do not know; we can but take the mystery as it is, and nerve ourselves for loss, and for our few hours' sentry-go. Pace, pace on quarter-guard; and tell your friends that they may pass, for all is well.

The bitter title of the book was: "Pass, Friends; All's Well."

A volume of poems may be a small thing, and Tony may have been a man with a clearer insight into himself than most; still, the publication of a first book is a draught intoxicating enough for the sanest man, and will mount him on galloping hopes that soon leave reason nowhere. If the book did create its sensation—and it might! it might! Why not? Some of these poems were terrible, and must sear the heart of any man who could understand them and could feel. Were they not just the stuff to kindle resentment here and acclamation there, and so be argued hotly in the smoke of literary dens and over the wine of fashionable boards? . . . Yes. . . . Oh, yes! . . . One thought so.

As the days came and went, narrowing the distance from the October Saturday, till it was only four days, three days, two days away, Tony had nothing but mechanical action to give to parochial tasks, so did the one glowing hope possess him. Not even in his letters to Peggy—still less in his chats with Honor—did he tell one half of the glow that surrounded this hope. He would have been ashamed to. No, not even to Peggy. Odd, this difference between his thoughts of Peggy and his thoughts of his wife. With Honor he always suspected that, dutiful though her enthusiasm would be, she would never really believe that her husband had written something great and would think his hope extravagant; but with Peggy his fear was lest she should await impossible things and be disappointed.

On the eve of the Publication Day as he sat with Honor in the tiny study of white shelves and coloured books, he did not open the all-mastering topic himself, but smoked a great deal and hoped that Honor would shortly do so. She did

mention it once, and said how exciting it all was; but then, Tony having suddenly become too shy to say all that he wanted to say, she began to speak of her sewing meeting—some ghastly sewing meeting that was making fripperies for the Autumn Bazaar. She dealt with it at length. God! Well, he said nothing; but dreamed his own dreams. He saw the Vicar coming into the vestry and pouring congratulations over him which he received with becoming humility and deprecation; he saw Alderman Scrase hurrying up to him and saying, "You seem to have done it this time, O'Grogan. Excellent! Excellent!" He saw Mr. Bray taking the Alderman's place and proffering his hand and his humbler congratulations; he saw a stir in the heads of the congregation, as he walked in to his stall on the Sunday after the sensation; and he saw himself, as he went about his week-day tasks, remaining the same humble charming fellow that he had been before this fame invested him.

And that night, as he slept, he kept company with warm visions that did not, it is true, seem to have anything to do with the book, but were alight with happiness, nevertheless. On awaking he remembered why happiness had tinged them. He leapt out of bed and waited for Honor to speak of the great matter. But she had been late in waking, and in the hurry of her dressing remembered nothing. It was a sorrowful poet who went downstairs, and a sullen and self-pitying one who sat down to coffee and bacon. Honor served the bacon and examined her letters; Tony, sighing, retired with his newspaper into a sultry loneliness.

Then the front door shook beneath the knock of a telegraph boy.

"Heavens, what can that be?" cried Honor, starting in her seat. "A telegram at this time!"

"I should have thought you would have known what it was," he sneered, and went out to get the telegram.

It was unreasonable, no doubt, to take the envelope rather savagely from the telegraph boy. Breaking it open on the doorstep, he read:

"Huge good luck tony dear wire any news so excited peggy."

"There's no answer," he informed the boy; and, ashamed of his previous anger, tipped the child, to his astonishment, sixpence. Then, delighted to be holding in his hand so fine

a weapon for the chastisement of his wife, he went back with the telegram into the living-room.

Honor stood waiting for him.

"Oh, Tony!" she said. "Of course! I've only just remembered. I was in such a hurry this morning that I had no time to think of anything. It's the Publication Day! Oh, how could I have forgotten it? Give me a kiss."

"Thank you," said Tony, and accepted the kiss. "Here's Peggy's good wishes."

Honor read the telegram and returned it to him. "Of course she's excited. We all are. Oh, when shall we hear how the book's going?"

"I don't know."

"Tony, how many copies do you think you'll sell?"

"Fifteen, perhaps."

"Don't be ridiculous. What do you really think?"

"They've printed a thousand sheets."

"A thousand!" She seemed surprised, and this offended him again. "We haven't a thousand friends."

He tossed down the telegram.

"When one publishes a book one doesn't rely on one's friends. There are forty million people in England."

"Oh, I'm *sure* we'll sell them all. Give me another kiss. Isn't it all too frightfully exciting? Let's go out and buy one. Will they be in the bookshops?"

"No, my dear, in the cheesemongers'."

"Tony, I believe you think I don't appreciate them properly."

"I know you don't. You try to play your part nobly, but you don't really believe in them, as I do, and as Peggy does. If you did, they'd fill your mind."

She had turned her face away to cry. Going from him to the window, she looked into the street. He could not feel pitiful, but, with a shrug of his shoulders, went out of the room, took a hat, and set off for the Thamesmouth Public Library.

It was hardly to be expected that any of the newspapers would have noticed his book so promptly, but it was just possible that one or two might have done so—Saturday was a good day for the literary journals—and, anyhow, he was quite incapable of staying away from the Public Reading Room in case . . . in case. . . . He spent a morning searching through every likely journal and finding nothing at all—not so much as an advertisement of Messrs. Aldo and Wright's. He declined

to be dismayed and returned to his home, humming as he walked; and there, on opening the front door, he at least had the satisfaction of seeing a large parcel on a chair.

Honor, her eyes dried and brightly burnished with her resolution to please him, came running down the stairs.

"They're here, they're here!" she cried. "These are the presentation copies. Oh, I've been longing for you to come back and open them."

With her standing impatiently at his side, and now and then rising on her toes, he undid the parcel and picked up the top copy. It seemed a thin little book, in its cardboard covers, and for a moment he wondered how he could have imagined that it was going to set Thamesmouth, much less the Thames, on fire. But for his own protection he had to extinguish this flash of clear sight, and go on hoping. He took the fountain pen from his pocket, and, resting this first copy on his knee, opened it at the title page and wrote:

"For Honor my wife."

She gave her little leap of delight and kissed him.

Sunday followed Saturday, Monday displaced Sunday, and Tuesday, Monday; smoothly, noiselessly, the days came behind one another and piled up a week, a fortnight, three weeks; and still the book, wherever it might be wandering, made no sound. There was no murmur in the world anywhere; Thamesmouth was unexcited. Tony's mind, still tethered to his hope, circled round and round it like a donkey in a field, every day and all day; and in his more cynical moments he could laugh to think that an idea which meant so much to him could mean nothing to anyone else. When a month had passed, there appeared an inch or two of comment on the back page of *The Times Literary Supplement*, and the next Sunday the book was noticed, together with six others, in half a column of the *Sunday Times*. The first review said that the verses were "competent," than which few sourer plums can be offered to an author; and the second said that they were "above the average of such work," which is a little sweeter, but not much. Messrs. Aldo and Wright reported that they had sold thirty-five copies in this first month; and Tony wondered who on earth these thirty-five purchasers could be. Slowly he tore

their letter across, crumpled up the pieces, and tossed them along a high trajectory into the waste-paper basket. He had accepted his sentence.

But, having abandoned the larger hope, he still clung to the smaller one; he still hoped that Thamesmouth would hear of his book and lift its eyebrows in surprise and admiration. Somehow Mr. Broadley, the Scrases, and all the rest must be told of it, and not by the author. So, though he disliked raking for publicity (or, rather, disliked to appear to be doing so), he sent a copy, pleasantly inscribed, to the editor of *The Thamesmouth Advertiser*, and was mightily affronted when issue after issue of that rag appeared with never an allusion to the book. "Dull fools! But of course they can't imagine that it's of much importance. Isn't it the work of a local curate whom they've seen cycling up the High Street in mended shoes? Don't they know that I live in a tiny maisonnette in St. Wilfrid's Road? . . . 'Bless you, it must be an amateurish effort because he lives near us.' . . . Probably the *Stratford-on-Avon Advertiser* thought much the same of young William's verse."

In due course, however, the editor did give to the Rev. Mr. O'Grogan a column of what he thought to be very kindly encouragement and Tony thought to be damned patronizing and pretentious comment. There could be no disputing, said the editor, that Mr. O'Grogan had a most pleasing talent; and as this offended Mr. O'Grogan intensely, he was not pleased when Honor, anxious to do all that was required of her, broke into the room with the paper in her hand and cried: "There's a splendid notice in the *Advertiser*, Tony!" Nor could he do anything but counterfeit pleasure when friends stopped him in the street to exclaim, "I see you've blossomed into something of an author, O'Grogan. There's a quite flattering review in the *Advertiser* of something you've written. Quite flattering, it is."

The Thamesmouth Advertiser appeared on Friday evenings and was studiously read by the citizens of Thamesmouth on Saturdays, so throughout Mattins on Sunday the assistant curate of St. Wilfrid's, while he sang the office and read the lessons, was really thinking of the moment in the vestry when the churchwardens, coming in to count the collection, would make their comments and offer their congratulations, and the Vicar would join in the chorus. He fidgeted for the service to end, and Mr. Broadley teased his patience by preaching a sermon

in the anointed manner, which implies that he expressed it in twice too many words, and those words twice too lovely and too long. Good: it was over; the last hymn was being sung; the Blessing was being given; and now the clergy were in the vestry doffing their surplices.

The Vicar said nothing to Tony. He was probably repeating to himself with no small happiness, the loftier waves of his fine rolling sermon. Alderman Scrase came in, and went straight up to the Vicar.

"Thank you, Vicar. A most dignified sermon."

Inwardly Tony smiled. Mr. Scrase had used this phrase more than once in his hearing; and always Tony suspected that it was meant as a rebuke to him for some of his livelier efforts.

"Thank you," said Mr. Broadley. "Thank you, Scrase."

The churchwardens began to sweep up the coppers on the vestry table into piles of twelve, and the shillings and sixpences into piles of ten. From this almost automatic exercise Mr. Scrase looked up and saw the curate drawing on his coat.

"I see you've been blossoming into rhyme, O'Grogan," he said, and laughed, as if he had said something funny.

"Oh, you mean that little book," answered Tony carelessly. One would have supposed that no subject was further from his mind.

"Yes. I read a most flattering account of it in the *Advertiser*. Quite flattering." Undoubtedly he was surprised that the *Advertiser* should speak so highly of a friend's work. "You must have been pleased with that review, weren't you? I showed it to my wife. We had no idea you'd been blossoming into rhyme."

"It doesn't rhyme," said Tony. "Or very little of it."

"But it's poetry, isn't it?" asked Mr. Scrase. "I understood from the *Advertiser* that it was all poetry."

"I hope it's poetry," grinned Tony. "It's meant to be. But I eschewed rhyme as rather too sweet for the subject matter."

"Oh . . . well . . ." Mr. Scrase left this point, not being quite clear about it. "I should like to see the book."

"Yes, O'Grogan." The Vicar was speaking now: he had come out of his happy thoughts about the sermon. "Yes, I read that review too. We must all read it, mustn't we, Scrase? Can we get hold of a copy, somehow, O'Grogan?"

"Yes. Oh, yes," said Tony.

"But how?"

"At the bookshops. It's published in the usual way." He had no sooner said this than he feared that it sounded rude, so he added hastily: "But don't trouble to buy it, Vicar. I shall like to give you a copy. . . . And to you too, sir, if I may."

"No, I'm going to buy my copy," answered the Alderman, merrily. Truly there was an excellent joke in the vestry. "Yes, and if I like it, I shall buy several copies. Don't you think so, Bray? Don't you think that we ought to do all we can to encourage these young poets? . . . Is it dear, O'Grogan?"

"Five shillings."

Mr. Scrase formed his lips as if to whistle his surprise. "Is it? Really? Five shillings!" Fancy one's curate printing a book and asking five shillings a copy for it! Why, that was as much as a real poet asked! "Still, I'm sure it's worth it. Yes, I'll certainly buy a copy." He had dropped very quickly from "several copies" to one.

"No," persisted Tony. "I'm going to give you a copy. You can buy another, if you like, but I'm going to give you the first. I think I've got one or two copies here." He unclasped his attaché case. "There you are, sir. And may I give one to you too, Vicar?"

Alderman Scrase took the slender little book, and looked at its neat buff cover, its good rough paper, and its large modish print.

"H'm. They've done it very nicely for you, haven't they?" he said. Surprising that the publishers should have treated it so respectfully! "They've made quite a nice little book of it. You must be gratified. Thank you very much." The book went into his breast pocket. "I shall certainly read it when I have time."

"And you, too, Mr. Bray?" inquired Tony of the other warden. "May I give you one?"

"Thank you, sir." Mr. Bray brushed together his hands made dusty by the table, pushed back his cuffs, and took the book. "Yes, I saw something about it in the paper. 'Pass, Friends; All's Well.' A good title. Where did you get that from?"

"Out of my head."

Mr. Bray was surprised.

"Well, it's a good title, anyhow. Catchy. And can you get five shillings for a book like this?"

"That's about the usual price."

"Lord! Then I think I'll leave the grocery and go in for writin'. Eh, what do you say, Mr. Scrase? Thank you, sir." Mr. Bray's copy went into his side pocket. "That'll be a nice little bit of readin' for this afternoon—just before my—you know what." He winked. "Any lullabies in it? If so, it'll suit me down to the ground."

The Vicar, meanwhile, was glancing through his copy, and keeping his thoughts to himself. Tony knew what they were. Mr. Broadley was wondering whether he ought to be wholly pleased at a junior colleague producing books without a word to him about it, and selling them in the town for five shillings.

Mr. Broadley did not guess that O'Grogan, when he appeared next morning for the staff meeting was thinking only, "What will he say about the poems?" Mr. Broadley, in fact, had forgotten the poems. He said, "Shall we just——?" and they both stood for a collect, after which they discussed the arrangements for the next few weeks, till, at twelve o'clock, Mr. Broadley said, "Well, I think that's all, O'Grogan, for to-day." And Mr. O'Grogan went out into the street.

Alderman Scrase, on the other hand, did bring into the vestry next Sunday an intention of speaking to O'Grogan about his book, but a discussion with the Vicar and Mr. Bray as to the best date for a meeting of the Church Council drove it from his mind; and it was only as O'Grogan, who had remained very quiet all the time, was walking out of the vestry, that he called, "Ah, I read those poems of yours, O'Grogan. Yes, very nice." And this reminded Mr. Bray that he had been given a copy of the curate's little book, and ought to offer some felicitous comment on it now. But unfortunately he had not read it; he had tried to, but he never could abide "poytry," and after wrestling with the first five pages, he had retired from such a bruising contest. He judged it safe, however, to tread in the steps of the Alderman, so he too called out, "Yes, very nice, Mr. O'Grogan," and prayed that Mr. O'Grogan would not stay to examine his knowledge in detail.

Mr. O'Grogan did not ; he went out into the street.

He went out into the street, like Hamelin's piper, smiling to himself a little smile. "Very nice!" Those poems with their sorrow, their satire, and their beaten love! That moment he saw a difference between poetry and prose. If he had written the same matter in a good stinging prose, the Alderman would have fired with indignation and probably would have risen up and burnt the book in his stable-yard as a calumny upon God, Mankind, the War and other sacred things. Mr. Bray would have sat down astonished. But because the matter was dressed in verse and moved to music, it had seemed as unreal to both of them as a man dancing in a fancy costume ; it tripped its measure in a room far away from actual life and was quite pretty to watch, quite nice. A little music, and the sharp blade of a writer was turned into a cardboard sword. Yes, it was always the same : had not those good simple men of the Royal West Essex risen in their hundreds to roar, "Jesu, lover of my soul, Let me to Thy bosom fly," and felt no shame, just because it was sung to music and rhymed? Which of them could have uttered such sentimental words in all the seriousness of prose?

"Very nice!" Damn their unintelligent patronage! These people prohibited his preaching as dangerous, but they patronized his poetry as unreal and innocuous. All right!

All right! Suddenly a resolve sprang to life: he would write a book in prose. He would write a gorgeous piece of satire in unequivocal and lashing prose. Yes, *per Bacco*; suddenly the resolve was hot in his head, and the smile with which he had stepped into the street became more than ever like the Pied Piper's—because he knew some magic slept within his quiet pipe the while. He rushed up the stairs of his house to his study, that he might walk up and down with the new magic. Ideas crowded into his mind, and he laughed excitedly as he greeted them. They came and they came; and the face of each of them was more impish than the last. No lunch to-day. Two hours of a single noontime—two hours' pacing up and down his study carpet—and the whole scheme of the book stood before his mind. Even the title had leapt into view: "Sanders Sent the Wrong Wine." Very different from the sorrowing "Pass, Friends; All's Well."

And it pointed the difference between the two books. This book should be a frolicsome blaze, and its sparks as they

dropped in showers on their victims would sting. A supper, a symposium like Plato's, but round the table of an Alderman—no, not an Alderman; an Opulent Layman—with the wine circulating among the guests who represented every type that was to be found in your popular churches—and the Devil in a whimsical moment had substituted a bottle of his own for one of the dozen that Sanders the Merchant had sent; and this devil's wine looked like Oporto's best, and tasted like Oporto's best—but it had the diabolical property—though only for such time as its glow lasted—of lighting genius in the head of everyone who sipped it so that he saw the reality of himself, all delusion stripped away, and was compelled, in the urgency of his genius, to stand up and prophesy about the things he saw. He had the tongue as well as the eye of genius; and he denounced in coruscating terms the lie that he was and that all his hearers were; and then, the glow departing, he sat down, with no more vision in him, and was ready to be scandalized by the prophesyings of the next man whose glass the butler filled.

It was a joyous situation, and Tony was aware of a kind of gurgling effervescence as pungency after pungency phrased itself in his head. But the book would have to be anonymous, because, alas! when an author is diligent to achieve truth his brain is apt to play around scenes and people that he has known, and Tony's supper table, in the beginning, was remarkably like the table of Alderman Scrase, and the people seated around it were closely related to dignified parsons who had preached in St. Wilfrid's pulpit, and to prominent laymen who had listened in its pews. A priest not unlike Mr. Broadley was there; and he sipped the wine and stood up and revealed all the distressing things that he saw in himself and in his hearers. "I see, my good friends, that the life you lead is neither worldliness nor other-worldliness, but a murky mixture of the two; and I do not deny that some of the guilt of it lies at my door, because in my sloth I have abdicated from the dignity of thought, and in my fear I have shrunk from the responsibility of speech." Borough Councillors were there, and churchwardens, and they too drank of the wine and proclaimed their sins to the scandal of the company. Their wives were there, and as soon as the dark old vintage warmed them, they were a greater scandal than their husbands because the confessions which they offered and the accusations which they laid came with so violent an

incongruity from the lips of conventional and prudish dames. And as for Miss Pocock, she was the most surprising of all. "I am not wholly bad," she said. "I see that I am less distasteful than our dear Vicar because I have never had an intelligence like his to wrap up in a napkin and muffle from use lest it vexed my comfort, but I am appalled to see, as I do now, that my motives for undertaking some of my tasks have not had that singleness which I should desire. I do not hesitate to say that in my work for your Diocesan Purity Association some little prurience has mingled with my piety and made the work a pleasure. The opportunity for such weakness as that Society seeks to heal has never come my way, nor will it now, I greatly fear; but I have been interested in it, good friends; the nymph has been as furtive in me as the satyr in you, Vicar, and in you, Councillors, and I see now that in my heart-to-heart talks with my frailer sisters, when I have questioned them and counselled them, I have often sinned by proxy and found it pleasant."

During the next months the hours that he gave to the composition of this book were some of the most exultant he had known. Doubt broke through at times and whispered of dismay should the work be published—and published it would be; of that he was sure—but the drive in his imagination was too rapid and resistless to give heed to warnings, and he wrote on, with the excitement inflating his throat. Thick and fast came the ideas: the supper table extended itself far beyond the dimensions of Alderman Scrase's board (and thank God for that!), the room changed its character and took on the spaciousness of a banqueting hall; the Devil augmented his mischief from one bottle to twenty; the guests multiplied; tradesmen sat at meat who had accepted the office of sidesmen for the improvement of business; choirmen who sang to the glory of their own voices; a saint or two that the picture might have fairness and beauty; a curate or two who had all the vanities (let it be understood) that the writer could see in himself; an undertaker or two; and, to crown all, a famous bishop, sitting on the right of the host, who loved his high place in public gatherings, and a famous statesman sitting on the left, who made a great to-do of his churchmanship in the councils of the nation. At one stage the butler, wondering if anything was wrong with the wine, went out and sipped it in the passage, and straightway came in and, laying his hand on the sideboard,

published his frailties, and his precise estimate of the ladies and gentlemen he was serving. At another the host sent a drink, with his compliments, to the musicians in the gallery ; and the conductor leant over his balustrade and addressed an astounded assembly.

Impossible to tell here of the labour that Tony gave to this book. It claimed every hour of his leisure time and stole far too many from the time that should have gone to ecclesiastical duty. He aimed to make it a gallery of "characters" somewhat like those of Theophrastus and La Bruyère. And every speech of every character, who, for a fading minute, possessed the sight and the language of genius, he moulded and polished and chased into as witty an essay as he could contrive.

His energy was astonishing ; and he knew that it was because a repressed intellectual restiveness was escaping in a jet of satire and pasquinade. And, ever disposed to self-criticism, he began to suspect, as he worked, two things of himself : first that for too much of his life he had walked with dreams, and only when he awoke and laughed at the world like this, did he see it as it was ; secondly that, whensoever he was writing at high pressure, he had a strange feeling of being loyal to his real self, whereas, when he laid down his pen and went about his clerical occupations, he seemed to don not a little of the unreality that his book lampooned.

He was about half-way through the book when the year of his diaconate expired, and they made him a priest. He tried to pray throughout the service, but two of the young deacons who were ordained with him, and the clergyman who delivered the Ordination Sermon, provided him with some splendid ideas for "Sanders Sent the Wrong Wine."

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST STRIKE

THAT year a strike came to Thamesmouth. One morning the people of Thamesmouth awoke to see a change in the face of their town, because the strike was there. A wire from Unity House, London—for it was a quarrel in the railways—and the strike sat in every town in England, like an invisible commander who had captured the place overnight, and now occupied it, sudden as frost. Tony, observing a difference in the very sounds on the pavement and sniffing an excitement in the air, hurried out of his house into the streets.

Idle workmen were everywhere. Little knots of them in their caps and mufflers stood at the corners, either talking languidly or debating warmly; others strolled in twos and threes past the shop-fronts, with their hands in their pockets and the cigarettes drooping from their lips. A number had congregated outside the Labour Club, leaning in listless indifference against its wall, or standing about the kerb in argumentative groups. Placards of the *Daily Herald* hung in the club windows to cheer the men; and telegrams from London, pasted on its notice board, wished them good luck and reported the response of other areas to the strike call.

On the roads themselves vehicles of every description streamed in one direction taking the business men to London: private cars, charabancs, motor-cycle combinations, and even lorries. One man in a top hat and black frock-coat rode on his old pedal-bicycle past the crowd outside the club, and drew from them a good-humoured cheer. He was a humorist too, and waved his hand in acknowledgment. In this pleasant exchange West Thamesmouth greeted East Thamesmouth; and it showed that, if the strike had split the town into its two parts so that each stared angrily at the other, there

was laughter abroad as well, and it was to be found on both sides. Most of the men were orderly, though here and there a firebrand gesticulated to a handful of lazy listeners. The policemen, though no more numerous than yesterday and no more active, seemed more significant: the strike was in the town and had invested them with glamour. One turned to look at them as they stood in the heart of the crossways controlling the traffic; or one felt their presence at the corners where they stood and gazed in front of them, untroubled. A mounted constable who trotted towards the station was a thrilling spectacle; and the crowd before the Labour Club gave him a fine hurrah. Tony strolled towards the station; and its silence hit him with its strangeness: not an engine chuffed or whistled; not a train rumbled; the distances of the line were as empty of sound as its foreground. At the gates a group of men stood about whom one imagined to be pickets, but the wide approach behind them was as deserted as a school playground in holiday time.

The old exultation jumped in Tony; it jumped always at the sight of war.

Returning along the High Street he met Mr. Broadley. Mr. Broadley was hurrying along with a frown, enjoying the strike too, but in a different way. He had determined, Tony saw, to regard the situation as much worse than it was and to sup well of its rich alarm. Very conscious just now of being the Spiritual Father of Thamesmouth, he was wondering how the Church could play its part in the life of Our Town at this time.

"A bad business, O'Grogan," he said, shaking his head gloomily. "A very bad business indeed."

"Oh, I don't know, Vicar," demurred Tony. "It'll blow over, I expect."

"I don't think so; I don't think so. I don't like the look of things at all, I must say."

"They seem peaceful enough."

"They may seem so, but the men are in a dangerous mood, a very dangerous mood indeed. I feel that we, as a church, ought to do something about it."

"Yes, but what?"

"Well—anyhow, we ought not to remain silent at this time. Couldn't we—couldn't we talk to these men?"

"What about?"

"About the—er—the Mind of the Church at a time like this."

"But what is the Church's mind on the subject? Has it got one?"

"Certainly. . . . Of course. . . . And a National Crisis like this is a Call to us to speak out. There's to be a meeting of the men on the Recreation Ground this morning, and I am thinking of going and addressing the men myself."

"But what would you say?"

"Oh, I don't know yet. I can't say off-hand. But I should recommend conciliation of course——"

"It wouldn't do any good, Vicar. Rightly or wrongly, the men regard the Church as the church of the employing class and of the bourgeoisie And so, on the whole, it is."

"That's nonsense, O'Grogan. I mean—that's—that's nonsense."

"Perhaps; but that's what they think now, and that means they won't listen to us."

"Well, we can but try. I don't feel we should remain silent at a time of National Emergency. I am just going to see the Mayor and to offer any assistance that I can give. So I must hurry off. Good-bye." His tone suggested that if he was to save the state, he mustn't stay talking in the High Street. And in a second he was hastening through the people, his round buttocks and thick thighs tautening his suit of pepper-and-salt, which elsewhere swung loose.

Fifty yards farther down the pavement Tony met Mr. and Mrs. Scrase strolling along with the quiet step of the old.

"This is terrible, isn't it, Mr. O'Grogan?" said Mrs. Scrase in her gentle voice. "Very terrible."

"Oh, no," laughed Tony. "Only an unfortunate quarrel."

"It's Revolution," announced the Alderman. "Nothing less. When a single body of men tries to paralyse the community, that, in my judgment, is Revolution."

"But it can't be revolution, sir," Tony objected, softening his denial with a smile, "because it's legal."

"Legal?" exclaimed Mrs. Scrase, to whom this seemed to be a new and unfamiliar view. "Legal? These dreadful men?"

"Yes, Mrs. Scrase. Perfectly legal."

"Of course it's legal," announced the Alderman, "and the sooner we alter the law the better!"

"Certainly," agreed Mrs. Scrase softly.

"Well . . ." Tony evaded the argument, and as soon as possible escaped.

"These dreadful men." The sighing of these words by a quiet and loving old lady, who a year ago was insisting that the same men were "an army of gentlemen," had been almost enough to hurl him on to the side of the strikers. The wounding words did have the effect of driving him home, where he changed his clerical collar and black stock for a soft collar and brown tie. He was already in a brown suit, for it was often his custom on week days to walk the streets in grey or brown mufti (a custom, though he did not know this, that had perplexed many of his congregation). He came out of his house a layman in brown, and set off for East Thamesmouth, where he was going to learn, if he could, a little more of its people. One man at least from the western hill should make an effort to understand them.

Five minutes later he was knocking with the head of his stick on the half-open door of the Wylies' home.

"Yuss. Jest a minute . . ." called the voice of Tib; "jest a minute;" and she came down her narrow passage, wiping her hands on her apron, and peering at the visitor out of short-sighted eyes.

"Good morning, Mrs. Wylie. Is Joe in?"

"Oh, it's you, Mr. O'Grogan. I better not shake hands, I'm that greasy. . . . No, Joe's aht."

"At work?"

"At work? Gaw, that's comic. Yessir, he's workin' hard, I believe yer!"

Tony's eyes twinkled. "Well, what's he really doing?"

She put her fingers into the flaxen hair and lifted it from her brow. "He's gone aht to see the fun."

"What fun?"

"This 'ere strike. No sooner had he heard that it was on than he was aht of the house like an arrer. Jest claps his hat on, says 'Good mornin', Tib,' and was gawn."

"So was I."

"Was you, sir? Joo think it's going to be exciting then?"

"I don't know. There are a lot of people in the streets."

"Are there?"

"Yes, and the strikers are going to march to the Recreation Ground."

"Are they? Oh, I say! and there's all me dinner to cook!"
Already she had begun to tidy her hair for the streets.

"Joe took his cornet, I suppose?"

"Law, yes, sir. He's got his cornet with 'im. But he's not makin' any money aht of it to-day, he says. If he plays it at all, he says, it'll be to keep up the sperrits of the boys."

"He's all for the strike, of course?"

"Yuss. He thinks he is. But what's it to do with him, sir? He knows nothing about railways. Let 'em strike by all means, I say, if they can get any good out of it, but what's his call to be mixing hisself up with their quarrels? I says, 'You'd be a sight better lookin' round to see if there's a job of money-makin' work for you, in a crisis like this'; but he says he's never going to be a bloody blackleg—that's just his way of puttin' it, sir. He says he's never going back on his class. Lot o' gammon! But that's Joe all over. A bit of a rah, and he's aht enjoyin' it. And one of these days he'll enjoy himself into the arms of a copper—I ain't got no doubt of it. There'll be a set-to with the police and he'll be hittin' the first copper—if you take my meaning. He says he's got a fancy to do that once in his life. What I says is, 'You can give your sympathy and your moral support and all the like of that to your railway boys, but there's no need to go gettin' on the wrong side of the police for them, because that's silly.' But he says he'd be prahd to, if it'd 'elp on the Cause. What I should like, sir, would be for you to go and talk sensible to him. What I mean to say is, he thinks all the world of you."

"I wanted some time——" began Tony.

"And he's a sensible feller—in his *way*," explained Tib.

"I wanted to talk to him some time, Mrs. Wylie. Where is he now?"

"If you arst me, he's at the 'Runnin' 'Orses.' Or he will be as soon as it's open. But of course I forgot; you couldn't go there."

"Why?"

"Not—being a minister—you couldn't. Not into a public."

"Couldn't I?" Tony laughed. "I'll go there immediately."

Tib looked at him, shocked. "No, sir. I don't think you must go there. . . . I didn't mean *that*."

"I'm going now."

"Well, o' course, you don't look like a minister this mornin', if you take my meaning. Though I wouldn't say as I shouldn't guess, meself. Chrimes! Isn't that the band? 'Ark! Oh, I *say*, and I've all me work to do! That'll be the strikers marchin' to the Rec., and Joe'll be walkin' along of 'em, you bet."

"Well," said Tony. "I'll be off. I'm afraid I'm like Joe. I want to see the fun."

"Yes, it do get you, somehow," Tib admitted. "I wouldn't say as I shouldn't like to be goin' along with you. But there's all me dinner to cook. Good mornin', sir."

Lifting his hat, Tony set off. "These dreadful men." And yet they were England, because they were ninety parts of her. The Scrases, in their dullness, thought that themselves and their class were England when they were less than a tenth of her. And it was England that once he had wanted to serve. He had seen laughter and kindness in her, and toleration and fair dealing. Had he been deluded? Here were her workmen arraying themselves against her gentlemen, and the gentlemen hissing back with bitterness. No, a little heat, a little smoke of hatred to roll away, and the old virtue would be found beneath, solid and undestroyed.

Perhaps it was natural that one should not see her so clearly now in these years when disruption was everywhere, as one had seen her in the years when she was forced to integrate and become her real self, because an enemy stood without. No—he frowned as he walked on, trying to order his thoughts—one could see little but disintegration to-day. Look at Thamesmouth, a side-pocket of England. Even here one could feel on the cheek the wind of resentment and revolt. Joe Wylie, that idle and hearty soul, was feeling it—"in his way." Unaware that he was a symbol of anything, he was out with his cornet, trumpeting political change. And Tony himself, was he not a-simmer with restiveness against—something? And the Scrases were heating up to defend—something. The Scrases were the old world; himself was the new; Joe Wylie was a piece of flotsam drifting about on the waves of change; and Mr. Broadley—Mr. Broadley was the Church as it looked on, confused.

These jumbled speculations brought him to the doors of the "Running Horses," a shabby little tavern at the corner of two streets. His hand was on the single door marked "Saloon

Bar," when he changed his mind and, leaving it, passed instead through the double doors marked "Public Bar."

He found four men within. The landlord stood behind his taps, not fat and florid, as one had a right to expect, but long and lean as a hermit of the Thebaid, though hearty and pleasant withal; a young man in a cap and mackintosh sat on a stool against the counter and fingered a glass of stout; opposite him stood a plump man of a merry temper, to judge from the laughter in his face, the tilt of his felt hat, and the way he pushed his hands into his pockets to rattle his money and throw back the skirts of his overcoat; at a table alone, with a glass of flat ale before him, sat a heavy-bodied man, whose bowler hat, pushed back on his hair, exposed a large face, its eyes dull, its mouth slightly open, and its expression as flat as the ale. A wag, looking at this last man, would at once have made whisper of adenoids.

Tony ordered a half-pint of bitter, and took the glass to a bench against the far wall, where he could sit and listen to the talk. He soon had the names of the four talkers. The landlord was Mr. Harrap; the plump and merry man with his hands in his pockets was Will—Will Warner; the young fellow on the stool was Ern; and the heavy man at the table with the flat ale and the flat mien was Alfred.

"They'll be closing the pubs, I shouldn't wonder," the landlord was saying.

"Punk!" scoffed Will Warner, the merry man. "Don't talk so stupid."

"What's that?" inquired Alfred from his table.

"I was saying," explained the landlord, "that if this strike goes on, I shouldn't be surprised but what they close down all the pubs. Nor I should, neither."

"Gawd's love!" said Alfred.

"But they won't, Alfred," Will promised, turning his face towards the table; and he rang a happy tinkle with the moneys in his pocket. "Don't you worry."

"Nah!" Alfred had meditated for some time before he announced this conclusion. "Nah, they won't do that." And he took a sip from his glass, laid it down on his table, and sank back into his thoughts.

"Well, in case they do," said the young fellow on the stool, "I'll have another half." And, having pushed his glass towards the landlord, he sneezed raspingly and blew his nose.

"Got a cold, Ern?" asked Will.

"Gawd, yes," said Ern, wiping his eyes.

"Guess you've been sleeping near a crack," Will suggested; and both the landlord and Ern seemed to detect something funny in this; for they laughed. Alfred, apparently, had sunk too far into his thoughts to have heard it.

"The Government'll take over the railways; that's what I think," offered the landlord; "and they'll run them with soldiers, same as that there Bry-and did in France. I shouldn't be surprised if they did something like that."

"Stuff!" said Ern.

"No, you're wrong there," Will corrected the landlord. "What ole Bry-and done was to call up the strikers as conscripts and then order them to get on with it. Our soldiers aren't railway men, and they wouldn't know the front of a railway train from its arse."

Alfred heard this in his depths and nodded. "Yepp. That's true."

"Don't I wish the Government *would* take over the railways," continued Will. "That'd learn the blighters to rob a poor, struggling commercial like me. Jest put their 'ands in me pockets, they 'ave, and robbed me of pounds." He faced Ern, and rattled what was left in his pockets. "Yes, pounds, me lad; you and your pals; and I hope your rabbits die."

"How's that?" inquired Ern, sitting on his stool and holding his handkerchief in a ball ready to brush his eyes or catch the next sneeze. "First I've heard of you as a commercial."

"Yes, how's that, Will?" asked the landlord.

"How? Why, I've been doing a bit of travelling lately for the guv'nor, and I ought to be at Wolverhampton now, putting over a nice little bit of business, with a tidy commission, instead of wasting my time talking to a lot of duds like you. And now some cove's there with his car, I'll be bound, taking the bread out of me mouth. That's what the strike's done to me. Give me a tanner packet of fags."

The landlord slapped a packet of Player's on to the counter, swept Will's sixpence into a drawer, and absent-mindedly wiped the counter, as if he had served a frothing ale. Will, talking all the while, drew out a cigarette, sucked one end of it to make a mouthpiece, put the cigarette in his mouth and

lit it. "Let 'em fight their directors, *I* say, and good luck to 'em—so long as I don't have to pay for their fun."

Alfred nodded to his table-top. "Yepp. That's about it."

"What this country wants is not so much striking, but to get a move on with a little work. What we want is a Business Government, as Bottomley always said; and, if I had my way, Bottomley should be the boss of it."

Alfred's head went sideways in corroboration. "Yepp. That Bottomley had a head-piece on him."

"Stuff!" said Ern.

"Who's this Jim Thomas?" demanded Will. "If he had to run the nation instead of a ruddy Railwaymen's Union, he'd learn some sense."

"Ah, but"—this proposition was not so clear to Alfred, and the shake of his head expressed doubt rather than corroboration—"that Jim Thomas has a head-piece on him too."

"Jim Thomas is a——"

But at that moment the door was pushed open, and Tony leaned forward to see if this was Joe. It was not: it was Tib Wylie, with a weather-worn black coat drawn over her apron and a man's cap pinned on to her golden hair.

"Is Mr. Wylie here?" she asked, still holding the door.

"No," Ern answered her from his stool, "but I saw him half an hour ago, outside the 'Shakespeare Head.'"

"What was he doing there?" Mrs. Wylie let the door swing and approached the counter.

"He was playing 'Land of Hope and Glory.'"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Tib; and she explained with sad apology, "he's aht o' work, you see."

"Yes, and then he played 'Smile awhile you wish me sad adieu.'" Ern yielded to a fit of coughing, and spat its outcome into the spittoon at his feet. "Then a hymn."

"Well," sighed Tib, "I dunno. I don't like it. . . ."

"It was 'Rock of Ages,'" said Ern.

"It always seems a come-dahn for a man like 'im," continued Tib, her head shaking. "Picking up your money in the streets like that."

"Oh, but he's not playing for money to-day, he says. He's doing it to keep up the *morale* of the nation."

"I know."

"All the same he seems to have collected a copper or two. He give me a wink and rattled them in his pocket—jest like

Will's been doing here for the last half hour, though God knows why."

"Wellan-whynot?" demanded Will, instantly rattling them again. "I ain't got much else to do, with your ruddy strike, 'ave I?"

"Per'aps it's as well if he's making some money," said Tib, "because I shell eften buy him his dinner from the shop to-day." She sat herself on the second stool, and, in abandoning her standing position, seemed to abandon sadness and become her rich explanatory self. "I jest couldn't stop indoors with all the people in the streets telling each other the news and talking abaht it, so I nipped on a coat and hurried out. I expected Jow'd be along of 'em somewhere, but he wasn't, so I come here to find 'im. Did a tall gen'l'man turn up to look for 'im?"

The landlord muttered something; and Mrs. Wylie turned her face towards Tony, screwing up her eyes.

"Law, Mr. O'Grogan! I never thought to see you sittin' there. Law! Fency that now!"

"Why not?" laughed Tony, rising in his place, since a woman had greeted him. Embarrassment emptied his head of witty rejoinders, so he asked quickly, "Will you have something with me, now we're here?"

More surprised than ever Tib stammered, "Yuss. . . . Thank you, sir; I down mind if I do. I down mind if I have a half of stout. It does warm you up on a day like this."

"A half of stout," ordered Tony; and when he had seen it delivered, he wandered back to his bench, for he felt that his presence in the men's midst was an extinguisher on their talk. Alfred's dull eyes had followed him to the counter and back to the seat, and were now staring at him. Tony felt exceedingly uncomfortable.

But Alfred's eyes were quickly drawn elsewhere, as were everyone's, by the first notes of a cornet on the pavement outside. The shadowgraph of a man fell on the papered glass of the door. The shadow had a bowler hat on his head, and a cornet at his lips; and from the cornet, as from a sound picture, came the opening phrases of "Land of Hope and Glory." But they came a little splutteringly, as if the shadow were laughing.

"*That's* Jow," exclaimed Tib.

"Bring him in, someone," suggested Ern. "He's trying to be funny."

"Yes, stop him—do," begged Tib. "I never like to see 'im doing that with me own eyes. Not that there's any shame to it, but I don't like it, somehow. Stop him, Mr. Warner. Tell him I'm here."

Will went to the door, drew it open, and, after joining loudly in the line of the song, "God Who made thee mighty *MAKE* thee . . . *MIGH* . . . itier yet!" said, "Come in yer great chump. And shut yer noise."

The tune stopped abruptly. "Don't mind if I do," said Joe. "I never expected to make anything out of fellers like you. Gawd no!" And he came in, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand.

"And here's your missus, Joe," added Will, in an effective climax.

Joe slammed down his cornet on the counter, threw back his overcoat and jacket, thrust his hands into his trouser pockets, and exclaimed:

"Gawd's truth!"

Will lipped his cigarette and stood watching and rattling his money.

"*Well!*" resumed Joe, when he was recovered. "Did you ever! I ask yer! Here am I slavin' to keep a roof over her head, and she 'avin' a glass of staht! And ole England fallin' abaht our ears. It takes the biscuit. It takes every blinkin' biscuit ever made."

"I jest couldn't stop at 'ome, Jow," said Mrs. Wylie, in one of her rich explanations; "not when everyone seemed to be in the streets, and I heard the band going down St. Mary's Road. But don't you worry. I'm going to take you back a bit of Hot Boiled from the shop for your dinner. You always like that, don't you? And *there's* Mr. O'Grogan, who's been lookin' for yer."

Tib's climax was quite as effective as Will's. Joe quickly followed her glance and saw Tony.

"Strike me!" he said. "Strike me pink!"

Tony grinned back at him.

"Law!" continued Joe, "everyone's out to-day! You on strike too, sir?"

"No," laughed Tony, and was tongue-tied again. "You'd better have a drink with me, Wylie."

"Well, thank you very much, sir; don't mind if I do. What's wrong with the usual, Mr. 'Arrap?"

Tony paid for the usual, which was a pint of bitter, and went back to his seat. As he sat down, he heard Joe whisper: "He musta gawn barmy."

"Cheerioh, sir," said Joe, toasting Tony; and as he did so, he saw Alfred at his table. "Christ!" he said. "And there's Alfred."

"Yepp," admitted Alfred.

"Well, gen'l'men"—Joe was now addressing Mr. Harrap, Will Warner and Ern—"what do you think of it?"

"Think of what?" asked Ern.

"This little old strike."

"Think it bloody silly," said Will Warner.

"Oh, *do* yer!" Will had given exactly the answer Joe wanted. "Silly, eh? Let me tell you what *I* think it is. It's the first shot in the Class War. It's the beginning of the ruddy Revolution."

"Don't be so soft," sneered Will. "There'll be a ruddy compromise, as there always is, and they'll be back at work the day after to-morrow."

"Yepp." Alfred nodded corroboration to the emptiness in front of him. "O'course."

"Perhaps," Joe agreed. "I'm not saying we shan't be beat this journey, but this ain't the real go. Eh, is it, Ern? Not by a long chalk. We're only beginning. You wait till they call *all* the unions aht; then we shall know where we stand. We shall dictate our own terms then."

"Come awf it, Joe," begged Will. "Come awf your tub. And why 'we,' any old how?"

"Why we?"

"Yes, why we? Are you a railwayman?"

"Why we?"

"Yes, that's what I said. Are you a railwayman? Or a worker of any sort, if it comes to that?"

Alfred, delighted at this thrust, nodded again. "That's one up on him, that is."

"Why we?" repeated Joe loudly. "I'll tell you why we. Because I stand by my class. That's why we. If they're being let dahn, I'm in with them every time. Isn't that so, Ern? When it was England against Germany I stood by me country, and when it's the workers against the Capittalists I'm in with them. *Nah* do you see?"

"Workers!" retorted Will. "And since when have you been a worker? You ain't done a job of work since you were demobbed."

"Yes, I have, then! So there now! I done a good many jobs——"

"Yes, he has——nah and then," agreed Tib, coming to his defence.

"Course I have. And let me tell you jobs ain't so easy to get for a Disabled Ex-Service Man."

"Come awf it, with your ex-service man! We're all ex-service men."

"I see! And was *you* disabled, then? Was *you* disabled? If so, it's the first I've heard of it."

"About as much disabled as ever *you* were."

This flicked Joe on the raw. "Ow, is that so!" he asked in fine satire, but with an ugly look in his eyes. "Is that so? And wasn't I wounded on April the seventh, nineteen-eighteen? Wasn't me shoulder smashed for me then? Wasn't I gassed at Ee-prez in November, seventeen; and didn't I get shell-shock at Passchendaele——?" Suddenly he remembered the presence of Tony. "The gas and the shell-shock were nothing to speak of, I'll admit, but this gentleman here knows that I was knocked right aht in April, eighteen. It was along of him that I was struck dahn. Isn't that so, sir?"

"Certainly, Joe."

Alfred stared at Tony. "Gawd!" he muttered.

"Yah, you make me sick!" said Will Warner. "I was wounded——"

"Yes, but there's wounds and wounds," objected Joe. "There's wounds and wounds."

"I fought for me country as well as you, but I don't expect my country to keep me for the rest of my natural. All I want is, when I've got a job, to get on with it, and not be interfered with by a lot of men——"

"What I mean to say is——" began Alfred, who had risen to a half-sitting, half-standing position, as if he desired to address the gathering at the counter.

"——whose quarrels," pursued Will, "don't interest me, and, anyhow, seem damn silly if they do——"

"Don't interest you!" cried Joe. "Then they bloody well ought to. Their interests are ours in the long run, yours and mine——"

"What I mean to say——" began Alfred again, still in his half-cock position, and ready to go off.

"When I ask 'em to look after my interests," shouted Will Warner, "then I'll thank 'em for doing it. But are they thinking tuppence about me? P'raps and p'raps not! Gahn! My wages can go up the spout so long as theirs are all right."

At his table Alfred sat down, as if relieved of the necessity of delivering his speech. "Yepp," he said, "and that's all there is to it. There's no answering that."

Will turned to his glass on the counter. "I've said it before, and I say it again: I don't expect my country to keep me. I've got some pride, I have."

"And ain't I?" demanded Joe, taking a menacing step forward. "Ain't I got me pride too?"

Will drank from his glass, put it back on the counter, and pushed it away from him.

"Not so as you'd notice it," he said.

"Oh, that's what you say, is it?"

"Yes, that's what I said."

"Then I tell you you're a liar."

"Liar?" said Will. "Liar?"

"Yes. And a ——" The word Joe used may not be told.

"Oh? And a ——" Will's lower lip protruded, and he faced Joe.

Meanwhile Ern spat quietly into the spittoon. "Slosh him one on the jaw, Will," he recommended.

"I've more than half a mind to," said Will.

And Alfred rose to his half-cock position again. "Yepp. Don't take that from him, Will."

But here Mrs. Wylie entered the quarrel, thrusting her face towards Ern. "And *you* shut up," she ordered him. "'Tisn't no business of yours. I may not agree with all that Mr. Wylie says, but Mr. Warner ain't got no call to say he hasn't his pride. . . . Nah, it's enough to make any man call names."

"I'll pride him," said Joe, stepping forward.

"Yes, slosh him one on the ear'-ole, Joe," advised Ern, with magnificent impartiality.

"Now then!" called the landlord. "Don't start fighting in here."

"He called me a ——" explained Will.

"Well, you can't fight him here."

At his table Alfred reverted slowly, very slowly, to the less dangerous sitting position, while Mrs. Wylie drew her husband back. "Yes, you leave him be, Joe," she soothed. "If he calls you names, don't you copy him. It ain't gentlemanly."

"I'm not fighting anyone," Will assured the company. "If he likes to say I'm a liar, he can. Coming from him, it don't worry me. We all know what he is."

"And what do you mean by that?" hissed Joe.

"Now then!" called the landlord warningly.

"Yuss," said Tib. "That was nasty, that was. But you come away, Joe. Mr. Warner must be tight to talk to you the way he does."

"Well, I dunno . . ." said Joe, looking at Will. "I sometimes wish I were dead when I look at fellers like you. Straight I do."

Will shrugged his shoulders to express an utter indifference to anything Mr. and Mrs. Wylie might say of him; and Joe turned to the landlord. "Gimme another half of the usual, Jim," he snapped.

It was while the landlord was drawing the ale, and Joe was feeling in his hip-pocket for some money, that Will suddenly, and almost peevishly, tossed a shilling on to the counter. "Here, 'ave it with me," he grumbled. "That one's on me, Mr. 'Arrap; and give another to his missus, if she'll have it."

Joe stared at him.

"Yes, jest to show there's no ill-feeling—really," Will explained. "Perhaps I did rile you a bit."

"Strike me pink, Tib," said Joe, still staring at Will, "but I believe he's a gent."

"Yuss," Tib agreed. "That was the act of a real gentleman, I'll say it anywhere. It isn't many as'd behave like that. And I reckon you might tell him you're sorry, too, because you *were* rude, yer know. I didn't like to hear it, comin' from you, I must say. There, tell 'im you're sorry."

"Well, then, I am then," said Joe.

"Oh, shut it," begged Will. "Put your nose in the mug."

"That's what I will do—gaw!" said Joe. "And here's to yer. All the very best."

Will drank too. "That's it, mate," said he.

"All I meant," explained Joe, "was like this: what I was trying to say was we don't stand together enough as a class."

Not as a class, we don't. We grumble and grahse, but we never get a move on, unless our pockets are hit, whereas if we all worked together . . . But we're too darned easy-going, I reckon, and the nobs know it and take advantage of it; and I'm not sure that I blame them, neither. We grahse and do nothing about it, blast our bloody eyes."

Whereat Joe drank a heart-felt damnation to himself and his class.

"I dare say you're right," Will allowed.

The air having lightened thus happily, Tony seized the moment for escape. He got up, nodded good-day to all, and walked out.

"Who's *he*?" asked Will of the landlord, when the door had swung behind him.

"God knows," said Mr. Harrap.

"He?" Joe was always delighted to possess exclusive information. "He's Captain O'Grogan; and he commanded my company in the 15th Royal West Essex. I was his batman in Gallipoli, Sinai and France."

"Go on!" exclaimed Will, incredulously.

"And one o' the best, he was. Got a D.S.O. at Ee-prez."

"Go on!"

"And he's a minister now at St. Wilfrid's," added Tib.

"Shut up, Tib," commanded Joe. "I'll lay he didn't want that known."

"He's a *what*?" asked Alfred, from his table.

"Minister at St. Wilfrid's," Ern promptly informed him.

"*Him*?" Alfred nodded towards the place where Tony had sat. "That feller?"

"Yes."

"Gawd's love!" said Alfred.

CHAPTER VII

SHOCKS FOR THAMESMOUTH

OF all the sermons that the new curate preached from the pulpit of St. Wilfrid's the most famous was the one delivered, in very quiet tones, on that Sunday when the Railway Strike was in Thamesmouth. Most famous in its little world, because it was longest remembered, best disliked and most often mentioned by his enemies. And yet it was very simple and quiet. All his sermons were simple and quiet. Fretted by the pomposities with which that pulpit usually resounded, and loving with an artist's love simplicity and restraint, he studied always to be natural in manner and colloquial in phrase; he kept his sermons within the modesty of fire-side talk. And for this reason there were those of his congregation who thought him no preacher at all.

It was not a very original sermon; indeed, it was but the statement of a very old truth; but its earnestness was intense. The springs from which it drew were not wholly pure: combativeness, self-assertiveness and obstinacy may all have been there, but in the main it poured from the deepest heart of Tony as surely as the sincerest of the poems in "Pass, Friends; All's Well." Combativeness, because in the last few days he had heard the strikers branded as improvident wasters, public-house loafers, Sabbath desecrators, drunkards and adulterers; self-assertiveness and obstinacy because it was the first important sermon he had been allowed to preach for many weeks and he had every intention of going on where he left off; but a great sincerity and earnestness because, with the best of him, he truly loved the men he was defending and the people he was addressing—and because to-night he was being loyal to vague visions that he could see.

The Vicar was away to-night, addressing the strikers; hence his permission to the curate to preach. Tony preached. The Vicar addressed the strikers; Tony addressed the accusers of the strikers.

The best method of defence is attack. He defended the Vicar's audience by indicting his own. His chief contention was provocative enough, but provocative, he hoped, of thought, self-criticism, and a larger kindness. It amounted to saying that, all his life, he had observed how sometimes the technically bad—the swearer, the drinker and the fornicator—could be fundamentally good, while the technically good could be—no, not bad—but missing goodness.

"It is going to be difficult to make clear what I mean: so please be very patient with me and very understanding." He smiled disarmingly. "To be tolerant and understanding is itself a part of goodness."

He went on quite simply. He tried to show that in the future, when the minds of men were clearer and wiser than now, they would see a greater crime than Illegality, and it would be Unreality, because this was a falseness eating at the root of a man's life and turning its flower and its fruit into a lie. Once or twice in his life, he said, he had met men who made him feel—and he could not analyse this feeling, he could only trust it and declare it—that it was better to be real and a sinner, a cheerful breaker of all the laws, than to be unreal and a cheerless slave to their tyranny. Such honest sinners had at least an integrity and a wholeness; they were their real selves, and when one met them one met the man himself and not his mask. So often, too, it was because of their vitality that they were offenders, whereas sometimes, with us others, it was because of our timidity that we were good. We should do well to ask ourselves often whether it was out of our strength that we were blameless beneath the law, or out of our weakness. And again: it had been remarked a thousand times that, as a rule, the timid and orderly had none of the toleration, the goodwill and the generosity which abounded in your fearless sinner. The timid were nearly always merciless—but, good people, it was an easy matter to condemn crimes one had not the vitality to commit.

He felt the wave of resentment ripple over the massed people beneath him. Mrs. Scrase rustled; Alderman Scrase examined his knuckles and a signet ring; Mr. Bray stared

up at the preacher, frowning, but not in hostility so much as bewilderment.

"Ah," said Tony, sensitive as a barometer to the atmosphere in the church, "I know I am but a poor hand at ordering all this into a logical argument, for the simple reason that it is not clear to myself: I only know that I feel it, and that I want to give my feeling to you. Perhaps I shall do it best by a story. Let me try to dramatize my meaning in the picture of a man whom once I knew and loved."

Then, still leaning on the pulpit's lectern, and speaking in even, unaccented tones, he told them the story of one man. Perhaps that man was not Hughes Anson. Perhaps the Roseate Hughes was but the germ out of which an artist, for his own ends, created a portrait more humane than any for which that jovial offender could have sat. Perhaps it was just Hughes Anson as a lover chose to see him and to hold him in memory. And yet Tony was not sparing him as a sinner: for his own purposes he was heightening the lights and deepening the shadows; and the people listened attentively. Ay, this man was a sinner if ever there was one: he swore and blasphemed with the best, and was not without pride in a language which could light up the battlefield for miles around; too often, when opportunity presented itself, he went off to adventure among women and came back aglow and rosy with his tales; too often, when circumstances were favourable, he sought the merry lands of intoxication and took others with him along the same road—and yet one could not know him without feeling that in his essence he was good.

Again that flutter of impatience through his listeners. But unrepentantly, and very quietly, he pursued his story.

"The last act of this man was a crime. Down in a dug-out in front of Passchendaele, he robbed another unit of all their rum, and gave it in generous but illegal measure to his own men, and then led them out to the battle and died with them."

Tony paused.

"I hardly know why I found him good. Let me try to see why. In the first place, if he was illegal, he was not false; he was himself, and this, because it gave him the ease of integrity, left him energy for much that was good. He overflowed with friendliness towards all he met; he was kind and concealed his kindness; he would go out of his way to serve a friend, and not for praise, because often he kept the service

out of his friend's sight and out of the sight of all men ; he was always joyous and laughing under the worst conditions and he kept others joyous and laughing too ; he respected the different opinions of other men, and he honoured an austere morality, wherever he saw it, as something too high for him ; he was brave ; he was the best commander I ever knew, and his men loved him.

"And if this man was not good, I know not where goodness lies."

After that sermon Tony had but to divide his critics into their varying blocks. There were the stubborn, who disliked his opinions and therefore disliked him and thought him a fool ; and Mr. and Mrs. Scrase must now be accounted of their party. "Such talk is not only a countenancing of immorality, but an incitement to it," said the Alderman ; and his lady echoed him, shaking her head sorrowfully and uttering, as her manner was, the hardest words in the gentlest voice. "Terrible, terrible," she said. There were the amicable and unintelligent, who resisted the doctrine no less, but could not bring themselves to dislike the man ; and Mr. Bray, at moments, was such a one. "Pity he's such a Socialist," Mr. Bray would say, "because he's a nice fellow at heart." Then there was a third party, and the Vicar might be pronounced its leader, who had sufficient intelligence to know that, if they whipped their brains out of their indolence, they would see a deal of sense in the young man's views ; it was not the views which Mr. Broadley disliked, but their utterance aloud.

He took the young man to task about this one evening, as they smoked together in his drawing-room.

"I don't quarrel with your substance, my boy, but with your manner, if I may say so. It's fatal to be provocative—fatal. In my thirty years as a priest, if I've learnt one thing, it's this, to be very tender with the consciences of the weaker brethren. Very tender. Now look at the time you chose : right in the middle of the strike, when feelings ran high. It was dangerous to speak at a moment like that. After the men were beaten, then, I feel, your sermon would have been unexceptionable."

"Possibly," Tony allowed.

"Yes, and our people would have listened then to a talk about generosity and—and all the rest of it. They are good-hearted people. But one must go gently with them, O'Grogan. Yes, I'm sure of it. It's fatal to be provocative."

"D'you know, Vicar, I'm not sure that I agree with you," said Tony, and laughed, that the disagreement might not shock too much. "I sometimes think that it's fatal not to be provocative."

"Oh, that's nonsense—nonsense," protested Mr. Broadley. "Forgive me, but how old are you, O'Grogan?"

"Thirty-four."

"And I'm fifty-seven. I was ordained at twenty-three. That's to say I was being ordained when you were being born."

"Oh?" said Tony. His accent suggested that this was an interesting but irrelevant fact.

"Yes; so don't you think that in this matter I am more likely to be right than you?"

"Not necessarily, Vicar. I can never see that the age of a speaker affects the validity of his argument."

"Oh, but that's nonsense." It was somewhere here that the Vicar retired from intelligent thought.

"But why?" demanded Tony brightly. He was enjoying the argument. "If it's nonsense, then it follows that the Bishop, who is seventy, will always be more likely to be right than you—which, as you will allow, is absurd."

"I always bow to the Bishop's ruling," said Mr. Broadley.

"Yes, but in profound disagreement sometimes."

"Hrmmm . . . well . . ." muttered the Vicar, and bent forward to stir the fire: he had no reply to hand.

Tony could not doubt that Honor, though always loyal to him in word, must be placed among those who disliked much that he preached in church or argued in rooms. She had quite failed to grasp his meaning when he suggested that a man could be at once immoral and good; and she could not see why, even if he thought such things, he should say them in public. She wanted him to be popular in the parish, and he was getting himself disliked; and it was silly. He tried to explain his meaning to her, on the Sunday evening after the sermon, but her brow furrowed in her inability to understand, and her arguments on the other side, so facile, quick and unsubtle, exasperated him not a little. When she said, "You'll make yourself so unpopular, Tony," he retorted warmly, "Oh,

dammit, what do I care for that?" and Honor sighed and carried the argument no further. But she went to bed, thinking that men could be very quixotic and perverse.

Once set, these parties were not to be quickly dissolved, and they were still in being, many months later, when an anonymous book offered itself to the world under the curious title, "Sanders Sent the Wrong Wine." Thamesmouth did not notice its publication. It was necessary for a book to make a big noise in London, and an increasing one, before its reverberations were felt in Thamesmouth; and this book, it would seem, had failed to strike the London gong. Its author had approached its publication day with all those emotions of excitement, doubt and hope which he had carried towards the publication of his earlier book of poems; but he had also stiffened himself for another blow of disappointment; and when it came, he took it almost callously on the place where he had taken his last. The book seeming likely to "flop," he was glad that it was anonymous: he would be spared the spoken sympathy of his friends, and what was worse, their unspoken distrust of his talent. He could wish that he had not even mentioned it to Honor. He had not done so, right up to the day of publication. But the excitement of that morning, when the six presentation copies arrived, drove him to the unhappy step. At first he had hidden the books away, but it was no good: thirsting for a word of praise, and for companionship in excitement, he ran upstairs, two steps at a time, to the room where Honor was making the beds.

"This seems to be rather a quaint book," he said. "I want you to read it."

"What is it?" she asked, less interested, just now, in literary criticism than in turning the sheet over the blanket and smoothing it down.

"It's got the rummiest title."

"Is it a novel?"

"No. I don't know how you'd describe it." He opened the book and turned over a few of its pages as if he would consider it again, not being completely familiar with it yet. He did not show that he was loving it as his own child. "It's really a series of essays put into the mouths of some imaginary people."

"Oh, I hate essays. Must I read it?"

"No." Nervously he shut the book with a snap. "I

ought to have known you wouldn't look at it, unless it was the lightest of fiction. It's unfortunately a book of ideas"—he walked to the window and stared out sadly—"and the ideas happened to tally with my own—that's all."

Honor looked up. "What's the matter, Tony? You're not huffy, are you?"

"Oh, no. No," he answered sarcastically. It was senseless, the sarcasm, but it eased a pain. "Not at all; not at all. Only rather sad. One has a fancy sometimes for a little understanding of one's silly enthusiasms; but one is a fool."

Honor came forward and put her hand on the book to take it; but childishly he held it tight, and at last drew it from her clasp.

"No. I don't want you to read it just to please me."

"All right," accepted Honor; and, abandoning playfulness, walked to her dressing-table, where she pushed home a drawer rather angrily and patted into place her abundant auburn hair.

With a heart whose every beat was an ache, Tony opened the book once more, looked at its pages, and shut it despairingly. Then, keeping it closed in his hand and, humming a small consolation to himself, he meandered out of the room, while Honor, with a lift of her beautiful shoulders, went back to her beds.

But that night, when they were sitting together in the white study, Honor silently working and he pretending to read but really thinking of his book, she suddenly let the work fall to her lap and commanded with a smile, "Tony, give me that book at once."

"Which book?" he asked, and felt ashamed that he should persist in this childishness.

"The one you were so rude about this morning."

"Oh, *that* thing. . . ."

He clambered to his feet—as if the business were not urgent or of much interest—and took it down from a shelf.

"There you are. But honestly, my dear, you won't like it. It'll shock you."

"Never mind. You're quite right. I mustn't read only the books that I like. I'm doing this for my health."

"Promise me that you'll tell me exactly what you think of it. Don't say anything just to please me."

"I promise." And, tossing her work on to a little table, she curled herself up in the arm-chair and began to read.

Tony tried to lose himself in the book beneath his eyes, but he could not: he was compelled, every few seconds, to come over the top of it and study Honor's face that he might learn her thoughts: surely her lips would be twisted into smiles again and again; surely they would part sometimes in laughter; surely her eyes would be fixed with interest or twinkling with amusement all the time. But more often than not, as he stole these glances at her, he saw that the movement was in her forehead, not in her lips or eyes: it creased, either in an effort to understand, or in offence; it smoothed in resignation; it creased again—and his heart in his breast was like some polyp on a rock that dilates and contracts with pain. Sometimes she turned a page back, to read it a second time; and fretfully he thought, "What's the difficulty? The book is lucidity itself." Once she laid it down on her lap, and stared at the fire; and he decided that it was boring her; but she picked it up again and pushed on with her reading, and this action hurt him most of all.

It was two hours before she finished and laid it on the table beside her.

"Well?" he inquired.

"I think it's clever," she said.

"You're saying that to please me."

"No. I suppose it's clever."

"Which means that you dislike it intensely?"

"I think it's a little unkind."

"Of course it is! All satire is unkind. Have you ever read Swift?"

"No, I don't think so. Let's see, 'Gulliver's Travels,' that's Swift, isn't it?"

"Yes; and compared with Gulliver, that book's a caress. All wit is unkind. The wretched book *is* witty, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, it's witty enough, I suppose."

"Well, I tell you: all wit has a quality of malignance."

"Oh, I don't think so."

"It's not a question for thought. It's an accepted fact."

Honor did not dispute this, because she did not understand it.

"I'm sorry," proceeded Tony. "I wanted you to like that book."

"Well, I do—in some ways."

"No, you don't. It horrifies you; and I'm sorry, because—oh, well, because I wanted you to like it."

"But why? Why this book more than others? You don't usually get upset if I——"

"Why? Oh, well, because I wrote it myself."

"*What?*"

"Yes. It's been a little secret of mine, and the very devil to keep, my child. I am the anonymous author."

"Oh, Tony! . . ." She stared incredulously. . . . "Oh, I think you were wise to keep it anonymous."

His legs had been crossed, but now he brought his swinging foot to the ground with a stamp, sat erect for a second—then stood up, and began to walk about the room; and Honor knew that she had said a wrong thing again.

"I only meant," she stuttered, "that it would hurt people like the Vicar, and the Scrases and——"

"In a sense it was meant to hurt them——"

"But, Tony——"

"Oh, 'but Tony' be hanged! That 'but Tony' shows me how little you understand anything that's in my mind—how utterly different we are. It—it—it hurts rather. I honestly believe you'd rather be the wife of the unsuccessful curate that I am than of the successful author that I hope to be."

Honor sighed. "I'm only anxious that you shouldn't make yourself unpopular in Thamesmouth."

"There you go! Thamesmouth looms much larger to you than anything else. You'd rather have the praise of this mossy little spot—just because it's near at hand and looks important—than the praise of a whole enlightened world that's out of sight and therefore doesn't seem very important. Tell me frankly, Honor: supposing this miserable book goes—supposing it is a howling success—which would you rather: that I acknowledged the authorship or kept it secret? Quite frankly now?"

"You *couldn't* acknowledge it," said Honor. "As a clergyman you couldn't. Oh, no, Tony; think of the scandal."

"God!" It was not an exclamation but a sigh. "Well, you needn't worry. I don't suppose it'll go; it's hardly the sort. It'll perish quickly and be forgotten, and then we shall all be happy."

But when he said this he did not believe it. The book was only twelve hours old then, and he believed with an inflating, exalting confidence that its life would be large and noisy and long. The quiet of the first and second week did not destroy

this confidence, and the mild murmurs of the next weeks played on it and swelled it; it was the steady silence afterwards that persuaded him at length to have done with hope. He accepted the conviction that the book was dead; and he was surprised to find that, because the conviction had been pressed upon him gradually, it did not bruise very much. A bold venture had failed, and that was all.

But one can never tell what a book is doing, out there in the silence. And it chanced that a Bishop read "Sanders," and, being a young man with a nimble mind and a desire to see things done before he went hence, he spoke of it as "a healthy piece of dynamite" in a sermon in Westminster Abbey. Then a very famous author, whose every word was "news," poked fun at the same Bishop in an after-dinner speech, suggesting that his lordship was himself the anonymous author and had a healthy desire to push his own wares. To substantiate this theory he read from the book the Bishop's speech amid the uproarious laughter of five hundred people who had dined well. The newspapers reported the speech, and the book moved, leaving the tape with a vigorous spurt. At once its publishers resuscitated their faith in it, and sent a specimen copy to every prominent clergyman in the land, hoping earnestly that the moderns among them would praise it in their pulpits, and the ancients would denounce it in the same place. Which happened in the providence of God, though not, of course, as widely as the publishers hoped. The book accelerated its pace. The booksellers began to "feature" it in their windows, and the paragraphists made a stick or two of copy out of the theories as to its anonymous author. One gossip writer referred to this riddle as "the talk of London," and a curate down by the sea walked daily on air. Daily he drew into his lungs great draughts of hope. The wash from the London whirlpool rippled into Thamesmouth. Mr. Broadley read the book, to his distress, though, needless to say, he discerned no portrait of himself among its characters. The Scrases read it, and their indignation flamed, but they did not, any more than the Vicar, fit its caps to their own heads. Happily, they spoke of it everywhere, so that a great number of their neighbours sat with "Sanders" in their drawing-rooms, or in their London trains. My God! Thamesmouth was reading his book! And did not know that its author was cycling about its streets.

One evening the author and his wife sat at supper with the Scrases in their brown dining-room, and the book leapt into the talk. Tony maintained a grinning silence, Honor an unhappy one, directed at her plate, as the Alderman called down the table, "You ought to denounce the book, Vicar. You ought to denounce it from the pulpit. The harm it can do! . . ."

"It's terrible . . . terrible," echoed Mrs. Scrase.

"The latest is that some parson wrote it," said Mr. Broadley.

"Well, if he did," asserted the Alderman, "all I can say is, such disloyalty is unpardonable. Unpardonable. In my young days loyalty was a virtue. Nowadays it seems that every young man is ready to attack his own mother. Have you read it, Mrs. O'Grogan?"

Honor's face, coming up from her plate, was crimson. "Yes."

"And don't you agree with me?"

"I—I thought it was clever and witty," said Honor heroically.

"I found it neither clever nor amusing," assured the Alderman.

"I agree with my wife," broke in Tony, who always had a dare-devil love of treading on dangerous ground. "I found it hugely amusing, whatever else I may have thought of it. As a book I enjoyed it."

"You *enjoyed* it?"

"Yes; and in spite of the fact that quite a lot of it seemed applicable to myself. I rather like being made fun of."

"It depends how it's done; it depends how it's done," proclaimed the Alderman.

"Well, I thought it was done rather well."

"It was done in the worst possible taste."

"Taste," laughed Tony, "is a matter of—taste. All I know is that I should have been quite proud if I had written it myself." He sent a sly glance at Honor across the table, but he saw only the parting in her auburn hair.

"I wonder if they'll discover who wrote it," said the Alderman, rather as if the nation would then be in a position to take criminal proceedings.

"I doubt it," said Tony.

"It couldn't be a clergyman who wrote it," Mrs. Scrase submitted, with a marvellous incomprehension of the argument

that had gone before, "because it can only be someone who hates the Church."

"I can't agree with you, Mrs. Scrase," demurred Tony. "Isn't it possible to criticize in love?"

"Yes, yes; but not in public," called the Alderman. "Not to make of your Church a public Aunt Sally."

"Quite." The Vicar endorsed this, feeling that his churchwarden had scored a point.

"Christ attacked his Church publicly enough," suggested Tony.

"He didn't," Mr. Scrase denied; "He attacked the Pharisees."

"And perhaps," said Tony quietly, "that is what this author thinks he is doing."

"*Chut!*" The Alderman rejected this, but could not at once refute it.

"And if it comes to that, sir," said Tony courteously, "I've heard you attack the Anglo-Catholics publicly, and very effectively too. They're the Church."

"They're not, that's my point," said the Alderman, triumphantly. "In my judgment, they're certainly not. They're a travesty of it."

"Perhaps that is what this author thinks of the people he is attacking."

"There are no such people," the Alderman announced with finality. "*I've* never met such people."

Meanwhile the book, in the publishers' phrase, "continued to storm." An American house cabled a wholly satisfying offer for its immediate publication. Tony cabled back accepting the offer. The newspapers promoted the mystery of this best-selling but anonymous author from the paragraphs of "The Man about Town" to the news columns. The publishers bedded out, in every suitable journal, their large display advertisements, and week by week altered their tale from "25,000 copies" to "30,000 copies," "33,000 copies," "35,000 copies." Tony's head, now an adding machine, told him, to the disarrangement of his breath, that his first royalty statement would be accompanied by a cheque for £1,500. Packets of press-cuttings dropped to the door-mat every twenty-four

hours, and those which had been thin little fellows two months ago were gross and corpulent now. The American publishers, eager to catch the trade wind from England, brought out the book within two months of concluding the agreement, and, three weeks after, reported that "its success was assured." Envelopes of press-clippings from America joined the packets of press-cuttings from England. Pat on the day the royalty statement of the English house arrived, and the cheque too; and though the statement showed only 23,000 copies sold and the cheque missed the thousand by fifteen pounds, Tony was uplifted by both, and left the riddle of the 35,000 copies to be expounded later. A stranger knocked at his door, and the maid came in with his card. Tony read "Mr. Harold V. Lennard," and searched his brain to remember where he had seen the name before. An introductory letter from the publishers partnered the card, and in it they said: "You will doubtless be familiar with the plays of Mr. Lennard. He has approached us with a view to collaborating with you in an adaptation of your book to the stage. Having required from him an undertaking that he will not disclose your name, we have thought it best to put him in personal communication with you." "Show him up," said Tony to the maid; and his heart beat high. Mr. H. V. Lennard, on being shown up, declared his enthusiasm for the book and his conviction that if certain situations implicit in the central idea were developed, it could be made into a comedy of ideas with highly amusing moments. "Let's get on with it," said Tony.

Three days later a second stranger sent up his card: "Mr. Charles Arthur Hope, *The Daily Sun*," and there was no introductory letter this time. "Show him up," said Tony. A most remarkable young man entered; not remarkable in appearance, for in appearance he was like any other young man who, in grey flannel trousers and a sports coat, tries to look like a Cantab and does not succeed; but remarkable in speech and manner. His stream of words was more swift and full than any Tony had heard before from a young Englishman in grey flannel trousers; and his manner blent the ingratiating accents of an insurance agent angling for a client, a doctor encouraging a patient, and a tramp on the doorstep touting for the price of a cup of tea. He had come, said he, to interview the Rev. O'Grogan on behalf of *The Daily Sun*.

"What on earth for?" laughed Tony. "What have I done?"

"You know best, Mr. O'Grogan," smiled the young man.

"Is it about our Organ Fund?" asked Tony. "Because, if so, I——"

"No, Mr. O'Grogan, it is not."

"I know! It's about the repairs to the church roof? Please sit down, and we'll discuss them."

No, it was not about that either. Mr. Charles Arthur Hope, without sitting down, expressed his certainty that Mr. O'Grogan must know perfectly well what was a matter of great public interest at this moment.

"Coal," suggested Tony promptly. "All this dissatisfaction in the coal mines. You want my opinion on the fundamental issues——"

"I am afraid I am not in the least interested in your opinion *re* that, Mr. O'Grogan," said this frank young man.

"*Re* what then? I am at a loss to imagine what it can be."

"May I help you, Mr. O'Grogan?"

"If you will be so kind. I am—I am completely non-plussed."

Mr. Hope thereupon put it to him as man to man, while they both stood facing each other. To prove how completely he possessed the ethical truth of this affair, he expounded the imperative demands of altruism, the reasonable claims of self-interest, the kindly promptings of friendship, and the binding injunctions of our English good-sportsmanship. First come, first served. His paper had learned that the Rev. O'Grogan was the author of "Sanders"——

"What rubbish!" interrupted Tony.

"Excuse me, Mr. O'Grogan"—and Mr. Charles Arthur Hope flowed on. These secrets were difficult to keep in Fleet Street, and if Mr. O'Grogan did not allow *The Daily Sun* to publish the news with his authority, some less reputable paper would make a scoop of it at an early date——

"But aren't you out for a scoop now?" asked Tony.

Mr. Hope was quite unabashed. "Frankly, yes, sir, but by reputable means. . . . In fact, Mr. O'Grogan, I am instructed to meet you up to any reasonable amount, if you will allow us the exclusive right to publish this information, and will just give us some little story as to how you came to write 'Sanders.' Anything will do."

"Oh hell, no!" Tony protested; though why he should object to taking this money was not clear to him: it seemed rather sentimental. "But supposing I am not the author?"

The young man smiled pleasantly at a pleasant jest.

"Well, anyhow, do sit down," said Tony.

The young man sat down and produced a notebook and pencil.

"No, you can put those back again," laughed Tony; and Mr. Hope smiled again, shrugged, and compromised to the extent of putting the pencil back in his pocket and retaining the notebook.

Tony paced up and down with his problem. He saw that the book's authorship was bound to be divulged sooner or later, and that if he hugged his anonymity too long, till it was torn from him, he might appear to be ashamed of his creation. And if he did acknowledge it, he did not see why this young man should not have the reward of his prowess.

"All right. Go ahead," he said abruptly. "Only no 'story,' if you please."

Mr. Charles Arthur Hope stood up, plunged the notebook in his breast pocket, and prepared to leave. He was now as anxious to get away as before he was anxious to remain. Leaving a stream of fulsome thanks and assurances behind him, like the spoor of a snail, he ran down the stairs and out into the sunlight.

That afternoon and evening Tony was both excited and apprehensive. To-morrow he would be famous. But to-morrow the fat would be in the fire. To-morrow some time he would have to meet the Vicar. He spent a long hour in his chair, holding the bowl of his pipe with both hands and knocking its stem against his teeth, while he wondered how best to meet the Vicar. . . . At the close of this session, he knew that he was ready to meet him. He jumped to his feet, eager for the meeting.

Out early in the morning to buy a copy of *The Daily Sun*, he was not lightly disturbed by the very first bill that met his eye. It hung like an apron over the knees of a paper boy, "AUTHOR OF 'SANDERS.' ASTOUNDING DISCLOSURE." Business men, in sober suits of black, were buying the paper as they hurried to the London trains.

Hastily buying a copy for himself, he stood on the kerb, and with palpitating heart and shaking fingers, turned to the news

page. It was the lead story. Two columns of it. Mr. Hope had interpreted in his own remarkable way his promise that there should be no "story." He described the Rev. Antony O'Grogan's street, his tiny little house, his bright little maid, his narrow stairs, and his cheerful, book-lined study. To sharpen the news-value of his tale, he exaggerated the "comparative poverty" of Mr. O'Grogan's surroundings; he heightened the "surprising youthfulness" of this man whose book was "the talk of two continents"; he deepened the lines that contemplation had ruled along the young author's brow and laughter had graved about his mouth; he placed two very bright high-lights of whimsicality in his eyes; and he made a merry line or two of his habit of pacing up and down as he thought. He even reported Mr. O'Grogan's genial protest when offered payment for his information—" 'Oh hell, no!' said this pleasant, unconventional cleric." He subjoined a short biography of "the man of the hour." He wrote of his Irish parentage, his childhood in Kensington, his education at St. Paul's School, his experiences in the war, and the gallant action by which he had won the D.S.O.

Mr. Charles Arthur Hope must have laboured very well between leaving St. Wilfrid's Road and sending his copy to press. One rather admired him.

Tony folded the paper and hurried home; he was afraid of all eyes in the street. It was not unhappy he felt, but uncomfortable. Exultation sparkled in his throat and lit diamond lights in his head, but he had a curious feeling as if the outside of him was naked. He did not want to be seen. Indoors he tossed the paper in front of Honor, saying "It's all out! You'd better read this;" and she read it, and disappointed him because her alarm was so palpably more than her pride. He took the paper up to his room; but he could not open it again lest he uncovered that middle page. Those headlines quivered through him like a rigor. He threw the paper on one side and tried to read a book, but he had no heed to give it; and soon he tossed the book on to the paper and surrendered to thought. 'Fore heaven, it was incredible! It had happened. Fame . . . wealth . . . triumph over his critics. They had questioned his ability to preach to a few hundreds in St. Wilfrid's, and he had found an audience of millions. They had thought his poems very nice for an amateur, and a world was acclaiming his powers. Old school-fellows would be reading of him this

morning, old pupils of Stratton Lye, old war friends. The Wylies would see that paper. The Gabriels would see it. The Gabriels, the Gabriels, the Gabriels! Those cousins whose superlative merits had been so thrust down their throats in childhood that the one desire of the whole Family had been to flatten out the Gabriels. Oh, why weren't Keatings and Derek alive to see that he had flattened out the Gabriels at last?

He supposed the Vicar would be coming to see him soon.

But the Vicar did not come in the morning or in the afternoon. No one came; only a telegram: "*O tony this is wonderful the book is gorgeous why didn't you tell me hurray and hurray peggy.*" And it was followed almost immediately by a second telegram: "*What price the gabriels peggy.*" Ah Keatings, Keatings. . . .

Tony first came face to face with the Vicar in the vestry before evensong, and Mr. Broadley turned his face to the wall and sought his cassock. It was unusual for the Vicar to be there at all; as a rule he resigned the week-day evensongs to his curate. And he did not speak, but, unless Tony mistook it, his silence was heavy as the Horse of Troy with deliveries to come. The Vicar knew; not a doubt of it. Indeed, how could he fail to know? Coming to the church, Tony had seen the placard of an evening paper, "THAMESMOUTH CURATE'S SENSATIONAL BOOK."

Both robed and ready, Mr. Broadley said, "Shall we just——" and mumbled the vestry prayer; and they walked into the Lady Chapel. There was no congregation, so Tony went to the prayer desk on the right of the altar, and the Vicar to the prayer desk on the left, and they recited the office to each other.

Now all the world has remarked that, to people in emotional states, the psalms are apt to speak with a blessed, or accursed, appropriateness, and they did so this evensong. The verses which Mr. Broadley and Tony found themselves exchanging antiphonally, across the chequer-board tiles of the side-chapel, raised in the younger of them a deplorable desire to giggle.

"Many a time," said Tony to the Vicar, "have they fought against me from my youth up, may Israel now say."

"Yea, many a time have they vexed me from my youth up," retorted Mr. Broadley, "but they have not prevailed against me."

"Let them be confounded," suggested Tony, "and turned backward; as many as have evil will at Zion."

"Let them be even as the grass growing upon the house tops," agreed Mr. Broadley.

"O Israel trust in the Lord. . . ."

"Lord, I am not high-minded," Tony affirmed. "I have no proud looks."

"I do not exercise myself in great matters," hinted Mr. Broadley, "which are too high for me."

"But I refrain my soul and keep it low," continued Tony, "like as a child that is weaned from its mother: yea, my soul is even as a weaned child."

"O Israel, trust in the Lord, from this time forth for evermore."

Back in the vestry, Mr. Broadley preserved his menacing silence, till Tony, getting offended, began to hum a little air to himself, as he hooked up his cassock and took down his jacket. Taking his hat, he moved to go.

"O'Grogan," called the Vicar.

"Yes, Vicar?" Tony halted.

"I suppose this is all true—this news in the paper?"

"About that book? Yes, Vicar."

"Well . . ." Now words treacherously hung back from Mr. Broadley's lips. "Well . . . it . . . I suppose you realize that it makes your position here rather uncomfortable?"

"But why?" Nobody could have sounded more surprised.

Mr. Broadley shrugged. "Oh, you must see it as well as I do. The indignation in the town is tremendous——"

"Oh, no, Vicar; it is not as bad as that. . . . A few people, perhaps."

"A few! Why, if one person has stopped me in the street, a hundred must have done so; and all were shocked beyond measure."

"Oh, no. They were only saying what they thought you'd want to hear."

"Nothing of the sort! They were genuinely shocked. I didn't know I was letting myself in for this, when I offered you the title here; I did not, I *must* say."

"I am very sorry, Vicar; but if people——"

"Alderman Scrase has been to see me, and he's speechless with indignation. Speechless! He talks about leaving us, and going to another church. I will not have my congregation offended and driven away like this."

"Well, what do you suggest?"

"I have been talking it over with both churchwardens, and they went so far—though, mind you," the Vicar hastily added, "I do not necessarily agree with them, however distressed I may be—they suggested that I ought to ask you to resign."

"Resign? What on earth for?"

Mr. Broadley spread impotent hands: if O'Grogan would *not* see, he would not.

"I will not resign on account of that book, Vicar. You may kick me out, but I shall not resign."

"I am not at all sure yet what is the right step," said the Vicar, meditatively. It was his desire that Tony should feel his weight, and have a fright. "I must discuss it further with Scrase and Bray."

"All right, Vicar," Tony agreed; "and I hope you will give them my point of view, which is this: I will not resign on account of the book, because it will look as if I were ashamed of it, which I certainly am not; I am proud of it; they can fire me, if they like, but the onus of doing so must be theirs; and if they do so, it'll look very much as if they were afraid of the book."

"That's nonsense, O'Grogan; nonsense."

"Well, that's as I see it. You see, Vicar," proceeded Tony, not guiltless of a desire to "get some of his own back," "I believe, rightly or wrongly, that I have something to say, and I desire to say it to as large an audience as possible. You gave me but few opportunities of preaching, so I found my audience elsewhere."

"I gave you all the opportunities that are usually accorded to a deacon or a junior priest."

"No, Vicar, you did not. Not after you found I had a habit of saying what I meant. And, anyhow, I don't see why you should all be so perturbed about this particular book. It is not the first I have written."

"Is it not?"

"No. There was a book of poems."

"Oh, *those*——"

"Yes; and there were far worse things implicit in those poems than anything in this very light book."

"There's no parallel, O'Grogan. This book tries to be funny——"

"And I think it succeeds, Vicar. People say so."

"Well, I know nothing about that, O'Grogan," interrupted the Vicar, who did not wish to be jostled from his hectoring position. "What I do know is that, after a book like this, you will find it difficult enough to get another curacy——"

"Oh, no, no, no. . . . There are many churches and congregations with enough sense of humour to admit me on their staff. But even if that were not so, I shouldn't starve. I should write."

"Pooh! Don't lose your head because you've had a little success." ("Little success," confound him!) "What do you suppose this book'll bring you in, before it's done? Five hundred pounds?"

"Seven thousand."

"That's absurd. I've met authors and I know what their books fetch. If you make six or seven hundred, you'll be lucky."

"I have already received over two thousand pounds from England and America; and I haven't the least doubt that the final figure will be every penny of seven thousand pounds. Probably more." ("Vulgar," thought Tony, "but very delightful.") "You see, my American publishers"—these words sounded splendid—"cable to me that they are selling nearly a thousand copies a day. And then there's the play."

"Play? What play?"

"I am making it into a play. And that reminds me: if you and the churchwardens let me stay, I do hope we shall be able to come to some agreement by which I can do perhaps less than a whole-time job, and take correspondingly less pay. At present, my spare time will hardly be enough if I am to meet my engagements. My publishers have already commissioned three more books, and I want to do them. I believe in this work. So, in a sense, you'll be doing me a kindness if you fire me. But I shall be sorry, and I shall take up some ministerial work elsewhere."

The Vicar looked frightened. His talk about resignation had been no more than a pompous threat. He didn't really think the book very dreadful, and couldn't easily have told out of what actual facts he had raised this miasma of indignation, unless it was the fact that Alderman Scrase had threatened to leave. The idea of losing a curate just now, when curates were so difficult to get, was disturbing. The disorganization it would mean, and the effort it would require!

"No. . . . No, O'Grogan, I don't think you ought to resign. No, I don't mind telling you that I took the opposite point of view from Scrase and Bray. I said that, however I might dislike your book—and I do, I do, I confess—I could see that it probably represented the attitude of many Young People To-day, and every point of view should be heard in our pulpit——"

("Apparently," thought Tony, "he thinks the pulpit of St. Wilfrid's an important rostrum in the National Life.")

"—and that, if you had your appeal to Youth and to Our Returned Men, you could be of real value to us."

"Thank you, Vicar."

"So—no, O'Grogan, you mustn't resign. The work is too important."

Tony grinned down upon him disarmingly. One can always grin so, when one has reached the higher ground.

"But supposing I think my new work just as important and much more effective?"

"You must find time for both, my boy. . . . Of course. . . . Yes."

"That is what I should prefer, Vicar."

"Yes . . . well, we can easily manage that. But"—now Mr. Broadley grinned—"I'm afraid you've made a permanent enemy of Scrase."

"I'm sorry for that," said Tony, honestly. "He's a good, if rather stupid, old woman."

The Vicar looked somewhat mazed by this cold-blooded statement of a fact; then decided to recover his smile. "Well, I suppose, between ourselves, he is rather. And Bray's a nonentity, of course. Well, I've no doubt all this'll blow over. But you've given us a shock, my boy—you've given us no end of a shock—ha ha!"

So much easier to be quit of irritation and to be on friendly terms with all—wardens, curate and self! Mr. Broadley and O'Grogan walked out of the church in the friendliest manner, and talked a little more at the gates before parting.

Tony did not go home, but walked up the Thamesmouth hill and stood in a pleasure garden that dropped from the esplanade to the sea. "Happy Valley" men called this playground. The last light of evening filled the world, and the sea was all spangled, under a burnished sky. There may have been colours in sea and sky, but the dazzle and the

whiteness veiled them from his sight. He found a blue in the sky only when he saw the moon hanging above the horizon like a pale broken pearl.

The light on his thoughts seemed to match the light on the sea. They were spangled. Impossible to believe that it had happened ; that fortune had suddenly given to him all that the millions longed for—to *him* ; that a phrase like “ success beyond his wildest hopes ” was actually true of *him*—of him who stood here ; that in a day he had stepped out from the great multitude of the unknown, and taken his place among the few who were known of all men. And this tingling sense of power—he had felt it so when he was talking to poor old Broadley—was it illusory, or was it really true—this overwhelming assurance that he could do much larger and better things than “ Sanders,” and, before he died, create a name that the world would remember ? This evening he believed it to be true.

Benedicite sol et luna.

PART II

CHAPTER I

THE MONK AND THE EGOIST

WITHIN Antony O'Grogan, and he knew it well, two persons warred: a spoiled monk, and one who was the opposite of a monk, a creature avid for worldly triumphs and comfort and wealth, and dreaming often of passion and love. Probably the same two persons war in every man, and the conflict in him was merely sharper.

It was the turn of the second creature now. The spoiled monk would have needed to be much stronger if he was not to be spoiled yet further by the success and notoriety that came to Antony O'Grogan now. He was an author "read in two continents"; and his first book "Pass, Friends; All's Well," of which so few copies had been printed, was being sought by collectors and bought at high prices. He was a successful playwright. He was a popular preacher, drawing crowds to St. Wilfrid's, and pestered with invitations from all the livelier churches of England. He could not but see that he had drawn a new element into the congregation of St. Wilfrid's—those who said, "I'd go to church more often if I could be sure of hearing sane, entertaining stuff like his." Mr. Broadley, from his stall, observed these new-comers too, and, though a thought jealous at first, was not in the end displeased. He decided, instead, to plume himself on his wisdom in "permitting every point of view to be represented in our pulpit."

"This is just what I had in mind when I secured O'Grogan," he said to his warden. "He's young and vigorous, and appeals to Youth and to Our Returned Men. Yes, I was right in resisting you, Scrase, and keeping him."

But the Alderman was never to be appeased. "If you think so, Vicar, well and good. It is in your sphere, not mine. But don't expect me to be in my place when that

young man preaches. I consider him a very dangerous young man. That is my opinion and I shall not alter it. And there are others who think with me."

Tony could see well enough that all this success was ministering, not to the ascetic in him, but to that other intensely personal Tony. He had always been able to read himself with merciless eyes; indeed, it is possible he erred on the side of reading himself as worse than he was. But this is what he saw. He saw that the strongest motive behind his preaching now was the desire to preserve and increase his fame. His larger passion now was, not to serve the world, but to serve his own ends; and it grew and grew while the other dwindled. He would scamp his humdrum parish work, and escape as quickly as possible into his study where he could shut out the care of the churches and lose himself in the creation of a new book that should surpass "Sanders" in its brilliance and success. All interruptions vexed him; he was irritable with Honor, if she invaded his loneliness for one brief minute; he would even open the door and throw a rebuke at her if she made a noise in the passage. Impatience with all the simple, un-intellectual folk of Thamesmouth swelled in him, till he could no longer suffer them at all; they had nothing to give him that would help forward his ambitions, and he cared only, nowadays, for those few people who, because they were interested in the things of the mind and spoke his own currency, could give him much and enlarge and stimulate his brain. And as there were not six of these in his Thamesmouth circle, and as Honor was certainly not one of the six, he retired into books. He became a bookworm, mentally indefatigable but bodily slack. Nightly he reclined in a long deep arm-chair, sitting (as he put it) less on his tail than on his shoulder-blades, and read and read and read. Honor sat at his side with her work, but he hardly answered her when she spoke, because he found her talk inept. Sometimes he did not even hear her.

This new craving for privacy, this recoil from his fellows unless they had something to give him, this fast-ripening irritability, and the bodily inertia that had come with them, could frighten him in those hours when the other Antony awoke. Did they mean that the self-centredness which had always threatened him was going to win, hands down? Did they mean that he who had wanted to love all men was going

to end by loving no one, needing no one, and being alone? He was thirty-six—nearly forty; did they mean that age was going to weave an ugly mantle about him? Would the laughter and affection die out of his eyes, and a self-centred remoteness, glazing them, repel the advance of friends? Would selfishness square his mouth, as he had seen it do in Mr. Broadley and other middle-aged men? And would age find him utterly alone in that self-made prison of the loveless? Probably. He was exchanging affection and understanding for indifference; pity for heartlessness and cruelty, because there had always lurked in him, as in every man threatened by a consuming egotism, the seeds of cruelty. As a boy, had he not been cruel to little Wavers, and to Frank Doyly and to Honor when he was fighting for their love? And God! that pill-box at Passchendaele! Had his pity for those poor trapped Germans weighed anything against his desire to re-establish his fame? No, he had hurled his bomb. . . . Oh, but these were dreadful thoughts, and not the whole truth: there *was* that other side of him, which had loved and pitied many men and striven to help them. Was this better part to perish in the end?

No. He must save it, and work some harmony between it and the earthier self; and then surely the whole man would be—not the ascetic any more—but a reasonably decent creature. But alas! these hours of fine resolve became fewer and fewer. He watched the worldliness spread to wider and wider occupation, and ceased to worry over the conquest. If his values were all vulgar now, well, what of it? He was happy in them. Exultant. He was wealthy—think of it! He who had wrestled all his life with the coils of poverty had now a cosy £10,000 encased in the best securities and the certainty that, for some years at any rate, he would be able to add to it from the balance of a generous income. He had a large house in West-Thamesmouth, near the Scrases—"that'd learn 'em a thing or two, the old dears"—and a deferential manservant, called Paston, of whom he was secretly very proud. He had a handsome car, and rejoiced to show himself in it about the streets of his parish. "That'll teach 'em, those who thought I couldn't be a writer of any moment, because I was only an ill-paid curate. I confess it pleases me. It's no good, Honor, my child: in these days of psycho-analysis one must accept oneself as one is; and I am, I regret to find, something of a

swanker. So are you ; only you don't admit it. You enjoy a little ostentation."

A more unexpected twist to his character was this : a natural diffidence enlarged at times into a terror lest his vogue departed from him, taking all his fine income with it ; and in such times he resolved that he must make that £10,000 into £20,000, £30,000, while the sun shone, so that the future might be secure ; and thus, before he was aware of it, a miserliness began to grip him with its skinny fingers. The piling-up of a capital sum became another master idea ; it fought with his purse-proud ostentation—two ignoble combatants—and there were nights when his sleep went from him because of their battle.

And success completed the wall that had long been building between Honor and him. In the days when he was attempting sanctity he had tried to dissolve in humour and selflessness the knowledge that she was his companion and little more. But now, sanctity being forsworn, he no longer tried to dissolve it. Instead, brooding over his pipe, he strengthened it. There was a night when she rejected his caresses ; and he shivered into himself, and did not speak to her for days. And she asked him at last : " Why are you always so silent and sulky now ? "

" Sulky ! " he scoffed. " Sulky ! Can't you tell the difference between the silence of sulkiness and the silence of misery ? "

" Well," she said, " it's a pity you're getting like this because we might have such fun together."

Such fun. Poor child ; when she said that, he filled with pity for her—and with resentment. Pity that she should want her fun, and resentment that she should think him content with fun, when the one thing needful was missing. She was content with it, and content to think *him* content with it. Dammit, that was her offence. It would do her good—it would wake her to reality—if he proved that another woman would willingly and joyously fill up all his need. Oh, the mere thought of finding this woman could tighten his throat and empty his body of breath, while his heart sang. He felt like a child released to play in the meadows.

He conceived of her as young and lovely and passionate. His had always been a downward gazing love, seeking the adorer, and the sweet thing to cherish. He had but to say, " Daughter-lover," and his heart went apace with foretasted joy. And he believed that if he found her, he could

win her. Fêted and flattered wherever he went to preach or lecture, he had learned, and with some surprise at the humility which so far had hidden it from view, that he was attractive to women. He remembered his father, Dr. Ernest O'Grogan, and all the "Ernest worshippers" who had fluttered about him. Dr. O'Grogan's woman had denied him life; and he had suddenly thrown up all things else, and taken it. "And I have missed it too," thought Tony, as many another man has thought, nearing forty. Was he going to miss it for want of courage? He played always with this lovely, breath-breaking question. Sometimes he dreamed of a new and better marriage; sometimes of a grand passion, a parting, and a sentimental memory in two minds for ever. He did not know the fire that he was building. But he knew now that if he saw this girl-lover of his choice, and she would come, he would take her through it with him.

And then America invited him to lecture in her cities, and he went there, and saw her.

O Mary . . . Mary. . . .

CHAPTER II

ONE DAY IN NEW YORK

IT was an inert and empty Antony O'Grogan who arrived in New York at the end of his lecture tour. He had been shaken empty by fifty trains; he had been sucked empty by unnumbered reporters; and the shell of him had been bruised and flogged by the buffeting kindness of a hundred hosts and hostesses. To these hosts and hostesses, one after another, he had been passed like a punch-ball on which they could take a turn at exercising their remarkable powers of hospitality. They had changed with every sun, but all had come to their exercise as fresh and exuberant as he was jaded.

And now a sorrowful sense of the unreality of the whole tour was oppressing him. After the first six performances, his lecture had become word-perfect, and set in his head like a pudding in a mould, so that the remaining forty-five performances had been nothing more than recitations declaimed by an actor. The first time he had delivered his address he had stepped off the platform with the comfortable certainty that it was a magnificent oration; the sixth time, as he heard it flowing in easy spate out of his mouth, he had begun to dislike it as a river of nauseating cant; the fiftieth time, as the people laughed at the glib and tedious jokes, rose in acclamation to its sonorous close, and complimented him afterwards on being able to speak for an hour without a note, he had come to think of it as one of the great shams of the world. He felt a brother to Baron Munchausen.

Never before had he amassed such a sense that the whole field of civilization was choked with the waving weeds of social insincerity. Naturalness was hardly to be found anywhere; only a universal discordance between the thing that was done, or spoken, and the thing that was really felt.

"Simplicity. . . . Simplicity. . . ." As often happens, when one cannot clear one's thoughts, single words that seemed to express something of what he missed and needed kept repeating themselves behind his lips. "Simplicity. . . . Stillness. . . . Ease."

And while he muttered these words, sitting in the monstrous rotunda of his hotel—a marble hall that was partly a lounge and partly an arcade of shops, and wholly vulgar—a bell-boy came through the unreal crowds, singing his name like a street-cry: "Mister Oh-Gro-gahn. . . . Mister Oh-Gro-gahn. . . ." The bell-boy, a child of four feet high, who ought to have been out in the fields dreaming of bears behind a copse, was clad in a preposterous skin-tight uniform of violet serge, a-blow with buttons, and his voice was harshened and his round face cunning.

Tony rose and walked towards him.

"Here I am."

The boy presented a card on a salver, and Tony took it. Its inscription was "Miss Mary Dulcis Leith."

Leith. For a few moments he could not guess who she might be. Then he remembered. He remembered the exuberant and overwhelming daughter of his hundredth hostess, who had shouted, "Gee," if he was going to New York, she would at once write to her room-mate, Mary Leith, who was in New York right now, and instruct her to take him in hand and show him round the city. And Tony had said, "Thank you very much. That's frightfully kind of you," and had prayed Heaven that she would do nothing of the sort. But she had done it; of course she had; was she the sort to spare herself in kindness? She had written exuberantly to Mary Leith; and here, no doubt, was another overwhelming and exuberant girl, wanting to work off on him a day's catharsis of her abounding hospitality.

"Where is the lady?" he asked of the bell-boy.

The child raised a face that should have been a guileless flower but was, instead, an indecent hot-house creation of pertness and cunning.

"She's just inside the door. She wouldn't come any further."

"Why not?" Tony began to be interested in Mary Leith. The girl, it would seem, had some quality of reserve.

"I don't know. I guess she's shy."

"Is there anything shy on this continent?" asked Tony, who felt that this uniformed doll would be quite his equal in an intellectual argument. "If so, I'd better come and see it."

"This way, Mr. O'Grogan."

The boy led him on to the soft carpets of the Entrance Hall, gave a humorous inclination of his head towards a figure standing by the revolving doors, and disappeared. Tony went towards the figure, providing on his lips the unreal social smile. She turned and looked up at him; and there happened in Antony O'Grogan's life what had happened many times before. It had happened with little Wavers, when Tony was a boy of eleven; with Sybil Chandry, when he was a youth of sixteen; with Frank Doyly, when he was a young master at Stratton Lye. If a face can be said to stab anyone to the heart the face of Mary Leith stabbed Antony O'Grogan then.

Her face was quite beautiful. It had a high white forehead framed in black hair that was parted in the middle and coiled over the ears; black eyebrows as delicately curved as they were delicately pencilled; deep brown eyes, long-lashed; a soft straight nose; a soft mouth; and a small pointed chin. Her expression was lovely in its pensiveness. Her figure was less than beautiful; the shoulders sloped a degree too much to the long thin arms, and the whole frail body drooped a little, as it stood relaxed and thoughtful. But the figure did not seem to matter after a glimpse of that face; and, anyhow, it was pleasing enough in its spare childishness.

Tony, looking down upon her, felt an inexplicable sense of rest.

"Oh . . . are you Mr. O'Grogan?" she asked.

"Yes."

Her cheeks, pale as ivory, coloured faintly.

"Oh, Mabel wrote and asked me to look you up and show you round New York."

"I remember. . . ."

"I—I should love to take you . . . but I'm sure you don't want to come. You must be so tired."

He was about to reply, "Not a bit, my child," but the lie of it, to his surprise, offended his curious sense of rest.

"I do feel most abominably tired," he said.

"Ah, I guessed so." Undoubtedly a disappointment rang in her voice. "Well . . . never mind. . . ."

"But I'm coming somewhere with you, thank you very much."

"Oh, will you? Will you really? That'll be just marvellous. When shall it be?"

"It'll have to be to-day, because to-morrow I go to Quebec, and sail for home." And, as he said it, he felt, quick and unexpected—he who had been longing for the quiet of his homeward ship—a throb of pain.

"Oh, well, let it be to-day. That'll be just marvellous."

"Marvellous? Why?"

"Oh, I don't know why I said that. . . . Yes, I do, though. After all, you are *you*, aren't you?"

"Certainly. And you are you."

"Yes, but . . . Oh, heck!" It was so difficult to explain.

"Oh, *what*?"

"Oh, *heck*." She frowned in a merry surprise that he should not know this commonplace expression.

"Yes . . . I seem to remember having heard that phrase before."

"Of course you have. It's good Christian English. . . . But what would you like to see? Listen: shall we go to——" and she mentioned some of the sights of New York, none of which he remembered, because he was not listening to them.

"Would you like to see these?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, where *would* you like to go?"

"Anywhere out of civilization."

"What does that mean?"

"Anywhere where things are simple and quiet and natural."

The beautiful eyebrows arched in amusement. "Well, I don't know where that is."

"Nor do I."

"Oh, dear!" She pretended to impatience with him. "Well, anyway, I'll go and get the car and try and find it somewhere."

"Oh, have you a car? I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"Oh, I dunno. Everybody has a car here. It's so ordinary to have a car."

"But I *am* ordinary."

Tony only grinned and did not answer this; but his grin covered some such thought as, "I suppose you are, in reality; I suppose there are many other girls as beautiful as you, but to whoever shall fall in love with you—and I am very jealous of him—you will be too extraordinary. You will be incredible."

Mary turned away her face, and her profile troubled him as her full face had done; it seemed almost more beautiful.

"Well, listen," she said. "Shall I get the car now? Shall I come back with it in about an hour's time?"

"In about three-quarters of an hour's time."

"All right. Yes, yes; I can do that."

"Then let us say in about half an hour's time."

"Ye-es. All right."

"Then let us make it twenty minutes. I shall be waiting for you. And please: I shall be wanting you all day."

"Oh, yes, yes! That'll be just marvellous."

She was gone with something of a skip, leaving him to walk up and down the monstrous rotunda with strange, sweet thoughts.

Twenty minutes later a Buick saloon car rolled up to the steps of the hotel. Mary leapt out with a lively grace and ran up the steps and through the doors.

"Will you come right now?" she inquired of Tony, into whom she had almost bumped, for he had been watching her through the glass of the doors.

"Sure," replied he, imitating what he conceived to be her Americanism. "I'll come right now."

And he walked down with her and sat in the seat by the driver's. There was a brown-paper parcel in his hand, of the shape of a two-dollar novel. This he tossed carelessly on to the seat behind.

They drove away. They drove through a din of clanging street cars, hooting automobiles, and shrieking overhead railways, but Tony was hardly aware of any of these things. He never saw New York, and learned nothing of it till years afterwards. All his awareness was given to the girl whose hands were on the wheel. He knew that her hands were less beautiful than her face; and behind this knowledge the traffic roared.

"May I ask how old you are?"

"Twenty," she said; and he knew that he had suffered a dim pain because she was only twenty. If she had but said twenty-two, it would have hurt him less, though it would have hurt him still. And behind this knowledge the white cliffs of great buildings, and the window-fronts of great stores, went by.

"Well, you look less, my child. I should have put you at seventeen."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"And don't you be insincere. You *know* you look no more than seventeen. You're probably very conceited about it."

"Well, really! . . ."

"Exactly. Let's say what we *really* think. For instance, I am trying to think that you are much more genuine and natural than anyone else I've met. But I don't know that I *really* think it. Probably you're not. Probably you're quite as big a humbug as I am and everybody else is—but let me think it of you. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. But I *am* a humbug, I think; an awful humbug."

"At times. At times, no doubt," Tony allowed, somewhat disconcertingly. "But not by nature. No, no. . . . And fancy being only twenty. What does it feel like to be young?"

"Well, you're not exactly a grandfather yourself."

"I'm nearly forty." And as he said it, the ache which had throbbed when she said she was twenty, throbbed again.

"Well, what's forty?"

"As a matter of fact, I'm only thirty-seven; but forty's looming, and it looks awful to me. It looks like the beginning of the end."

"That's just ridiculous."

The car rolled on, and then gradually slowed, as if she had been visited by an idea and was examining it. "Listen," she said; "would you mind if I took you to see a friend?"

"Oh, must you?"

"Not if you'd rather not, but——"

"No, please. I want to do anything you wish."

"Oh, good! It won't take long. And I just want to show you to him, that's all."

Him. The word hurt. How was it that he could be at once so happy and at rest in the companionship of this lovely child, and yet be wounded by everything about her? That

"him" had gone through him, not like a sword's thrust, but like the fear of a sword's thrust. He said nothing.

The car swung to the right after the next block, and then to the right again; and they were back on the narrow ravine floor, between the faces of the great sky-scrapers. The traffic roared round them and past them, but Tony heard nothing at all, till Mary's voice laid itself against the muffled din behind.

"He's really rather a dear."

"Who?"

"Mr. Bragg, whom we're going to see."

Bragg. It was an ugly enough name, thank Heaven.

"Is he—is he young . . . or old . . . or what?"

"Fifty-five-ish."

Delight, most unwarrantable, flooded him.

"He's been ill," explained Mary, "and I often go round and see him. I sometimes take him out for a drive. He's one of Father's greatest friends, and a perfect dear, really. . . . And this is his apartment."

Then they were in a drawing-room, and he was speaking with Mr. Bragg, a short, grey-haired old gentleman to whom, Tony thought, this child had been generous in allotting no more than fifty-five years. All Mr. Bragg's talk was praise of Mary. "An angel of mercy who takes pity on a poor old man. A very bright young lady; a very bright young lady indeed. And such a heart!" He twinkled at her jovially and affectionately. "Such a heart! Such a heart!" Each of these tributes gave the same unwarrantable pleasure to Tony: it was as if he were gathering blooms to complete a bouquet he desired. "Yessir," twinkled the old man; "I fear for her; and that's the truth. It's dangerous to go through the world with a heart like that." Tony returned a smile, and it was a smile of gratification. Truly it seemed as if these compliments were being paid to something of his own.

Then they were back in the car; and she had said, "Now we can go any old where," and at the ordinary slang of it, for some absurd reason, he had taken a slight fall. The car purled on through the racketing streets, and their talk was very pleasant and peaceful, yet ever and again, the slight pain shot through it. She asked him about his wife, and the pain was there. Quickly he left the topic. She asked him if he had children, and that she should ask him this so lightly hurt

him. She spoke about his work as a clergyman, and the pain was there again; and he found himself explaining that he was a very restive parson, rebellious against much. And he suggested hurriedly: "But let's talk about you. Not about me. Have you brothers or sisters?"

"No; only Father."

"I see. And what are you going to do with your life?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"I do. You'll marry very soon." Again the pain, but sharper than ever before.

"I don't think so. I'm not keen on it. No, I think I'd like to travel all the winter—with Daddy, perhaps, if I thought he was lonely and sad; and in the summer, and in the fall, I'd like to have a cottage by a lake in Western Ontario. I should live there alone."

"In pity's name why?"

"Oh, but I should ask all the nice people that I love to stay with me, and we'd——"

"Do you love people?"

"Yes. Oh, *yes*. Don't you? But listen: and then we'd picnic by the lake and bathe and go on canoeing parties among the woods. It'd be marvellous."

"Strange child! But you must marry."

"Why?"

"Well, to begin with, unless I've got you all wrong—you could give so much."

Silence.

"Yes. What else?" Mary was much interested.

"And then there's——" Tony frowned as he sought for words; and his lips parted several times before he spoke. Then he started a debate on the desiccation of a woman's beauty if she withheld herself from marriage. To him, who was of an earlier generation the subject seemed a rather sensitive plant to offer to the touch of a young girl, but Mary was not in the least afraid of it. She touched it and opened it with a sparkling interest; and often he turned to watch her profile, as she too parted lips or lifted brows, waiting for her words to come. These movements of her mouth and her brows pleased him; and those of her hands too, which she would lift off the steering-wheel, as she exclaimed, "Oh, heck!" in despair of being able to express her meaning.

He asked her how she spent her days; and she told him that

she loved dancing above all things; that night after night she would go out "with a lad, Jimmy Faulkner"; and that "Daddy would get all hot and bothered sometimes when she came home at three o'clock in the morning, so that it would be four o'clock before she had soothed him down, and they could all go to bed"—and as she said it, Tony took, both together, the slight fall and the curious pain. The fall, because her words made her sound lighter than, in his foolishness, he had wished to think her; and the pain because of Jimmy Faulkner. The pain was enough to demand its relief in the question: "This Jimmy Someone? He's in love with you, of course?"

Mary laughed over her wheel. "Good gracious, no! Why on earth should you think that?"

"My child, because——"

"Because what?"

"Well . . . you see . . . well . . ." He hesitated most exasperatingly.

"Well what?"

"It's so difficult to say without appearing to flatter."

At this she gave all her attention to the road ahead and the steering-wheel; but as Tony did not continue, she was compelled to ask him. "Please go on. I simply must hear what you were going to say."

"You have asked me to?"

"Yes, please."

"Well, take the consequences then. My child, have you any idea how beautiful you are?"

The colour took the ivory from her cheeks, and had its way with them.

"Oh, that's just ridiculous."

"It is not. It is the simple truth, my dear."

"Besides, even if it were so——"

"There's no 'even if' about it——"

"Oh, *do* be quiet! Even if it were so, I don't see what that's got to do with it. But listen: it's half-after-one, and I think I know of a good place for lunch."

"Half-after-one!" mimicked Tony. "What a language!"

It was now that the important and even exciting fact emerged that she was not American, but Canadian. Mary gave a scream when he called her American, and affected some indignation that he had not distinguished the accent of the Dominion

from that of the States ; and Tony gave something like a cheer when he heard the truth. Oh, no—mercy, no—her home was in Montreal, and she had only gone to school in New York. And at present she was only staying with an uncle and aunt who had come to the States several years before.

“ Well, hurray, hurray, hurray,” said Tony.

“ I don’t quite see why it should please you so,” she laughed.

“ I haven’t the faintest idea why it does, either,” he admitted.

“ But it does.”

“ Listen,” said she ; “ there’s where we have lunch.”

He had no memory afterwards of the outside of the great store that he now entered, but he had a vivid memory of the spacious and pillared temple, on its top floor, where they sat face to face at a table, over a two-dollar lunch. On this table he laid the brown-paper parcel, undid its wrapping, and produced a copy of one of his own books.

“ May I give you this in gratitude for to-day ? ” he asked.

She saw what it was, and clapped her hands together. “ Oh, how wonderful ! I shall treasure it always.”

“ I didn’t produce it before,” he said, taking his fountain pen and unscrewing the cap, “ because I wanted to know you well enough to write just ‘ Mary ’ in it. May I do that ? ”

“ Of course,” she murmured, rather softly.

And he wrote on its title page :

“ MARY

from

ANTONY O’GROGAN.”

When the afternoon sun began to drop low that day, they were still driving on. Once she stopped the car, rested her hands upon the wheel, and turned and looked at him.

“ This is mad,” she laughed. “ Just driving aimlessly about. Isn’t there anywhere you’d like to go ? ”

“ I’m perfectly happy,” he answered.

In mock despair she hunched forward and dropped her hands to her lap. “ Listen : there’s a famous church not far from here. Would you like to see that ? ”

“ Not in the least.”

"Oh, bother you! You're not very helpful, are you?"

"Not in the least."

"Oh, don't be so dumb."

"So *what*?"

"So 'dumb.' 'Foolish,' that means, and it's excellent English. We must go somewhere."

"All right, my child. Let's go to church."

They went to the church. They walked inside it and came out of it; and two minutes afterwards he could remember very little about it, except its shape. For, as they got into the car again and began to drive away, something happened which was so much more vivid than the church that it hazed the memory of that edifice for ever. He was staring ahead of him through the wind-screen when he became acutely conscious that she had turned her face towards him and was studying his profile. Probably she did not know that he had observed the movement, because she continued gazing at him for a long time, while the car hummed onward down the straight road. Not daring to turn and meet her eyes, he did not know whether they were mischievous or very wondering. And presently she gave them back to the road before her.

They had tea in some Garden Restaurant—Heaven knew where—and the sun was gone from the day as they drove out of the garden. After a moment of indecision she turned the car down the way they had come.

"That means we are going home," he sighed.

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

Evenly and quietly the car purled towards the city, carrying two silent persons. The noisy streets spread themselves about it, and the hotel, where the parting waited, rushed towards it, till Tony, in despair, asked quickly, "I suppose you couldn't come out after your dinner? I've so little time, and I—I know no one else. We might go and dance somewhere. You like dancing."

"Oh, do *you* dance?"

"Yes, of course. Why not?"

"I don't know. I didn't suppose you would." Tony heard her voice saying it brightly; and far away, somewhere, the old pain throbbed.

"Will you come?" he persisted.

She did not answer, and the hotel rushed nearer.

"Will you?"

"Yes. . . . Oh, yes, I should love to. Thank you so much."

They parted at the hotel steps, Mary blithely waving and Tony watching her car till it was out of sight. Then, swinging round, he entered the hotel and climbed a thousand stairs to his room. He could think better, climbing alone than keeping company with a bell-boy in an elevator. In his room he gave great pains to his dressing and shaved for the second time that day. After his shave he passed the soft of his hand along his mouth to test its smoothness. He was going to kiss Mary before this night had gone into the past.

At dinner he joined another Englishman whose acquaintance he had made at breakfast; and when their cigars were in their mouths he led this friend to a seat in the entrance hall. The clock said a quarter to eight. Mary had promised to be there by eight. Talk tossed idly between the two men, while the eyes of one swung always to the dazzling light and loud murmur of the street, beyond the revolving doors. Ah, praise God!—she was ten minutes ahead of her time—bless her! The Buick was there.

"Come," said he to his friend, "and see the most beautiful child I have discovered in America."

This is not an invitation that any man is likely to decline; and the friend rose from his coffee with extraordinary promptitude.

"I have been," said Tony, as they walked to the doors, "across the whole of this darned continent, and from its Northern to its Southern states, and I have seen nothing like her anywhere. And she doesn't belong to them, thank the Lord, but to us. She's a Canadian."

They were now on the steps, and he presented the Englishman to Mary, feeling that unwarrantable pride of possession as he did so.

Then Mary and he went down the steps to the car.

"Have you any idea where we are going?" she asked when the car was clear of the hotel.

"Not in the least."

Her laugh rippled past him in the darkness. "Listen," she began; "suppose we don't dance. I don't think I really want to."

"I never had the least desire to," he assured her.

"Well, why did you suggest it?"

“Just to keep you by me a little longer.”

As there was no reply she could offer to this, she only asked, “Well, what shall we do?”

“Listen, Mary. Couldn’t we drive to some green places where it’s quiet, and perhaps halt the car. Then we could just talk.”

“Oh, yes; that’d be just marvellous.”

(Why “marvellous?” Why had she said that? Anything less marvellous for her he could hardly imagine, unless——)

Driving on. On and on, without a word spoken. Out of the city and into quiet roads where there were trees, and the lights were far apart, and night could rest upon the earth. But slowly, and yet more slowly. Why was she slowing the car? Did she, too, long to stop it and——

Her slowing of the car gave him courage to speak. “Let’s halt it here, shall we?”

Without an answer she applied the brake and shut off the engine. The car was still; but her hands yet rested on the wheel, almost sadly. Her hands were two pale spirit-hands in the darkness; her face a floating mist.

He turned to his own window and away from her. He saw that they had stopped at the side of a long straight road which crossed a green park. They had not even sheltered under trees, though there was a clump of trees farther on. Strangely dark, this open place, after the dazzle of the city streets; a single light burned at a distance along the road. Strangely quiet, too; far away the hum of a car faded and faded till it was lost in the night.

And now in this pause he had nothing to say. He did not feel that he wanted to speak: he wanted only in that darkness to put his arm round her shoulder and draw her against him. He tried to compel his arm to this task, but restless, leaping thoughts sapped the blood of resolution; and he could not. Mary sat silent too. At last he bade resolution rebut the crowding thoughts; and his arm went round her and drew her to him.

“Tell me all about yourself,” he said.

Her head had drooped, and she had not come willingly to him. Nor had she answered.

Bending his head to hers he put his lips upon her hair.

“No,” she said; and lowered her head still further.

He took away his arm; and Mary lifted her head and gave

her face to the other window. A silence, like the darkness, sat between them till once more he gathered her shoulders in his arm and tried to kiss her white forehead.

"No," she said.

"Let me kiss you good-bye," he begged. "I don't suppose I shall ever see you again."

"No. Please not."

Instead, when the darkness in the car was emptied of this mystery, they talked, and naturally, of things that interested them both. And of a sudden she announced with all her happy sparkle, "Come; we must go back now."

With a brisk movement she set the car on its homeward journey. It raced on, and the city lights drew near them. And now, as in the afternoon, the sight of the city ready to take them into its heart and there part them, seemed to force her to slow down her engine. Yes, the car was slowing—slowing. It had stopped; and she was sitting back with her hands in her lap.

Why had she stopped? Was it that she would like him to kiss her after all? He gathered her again, and with a hand on her cheek tried to turn her face upward. For a moment she came with the whole gift of herself towards him, and her lips touched his; then she fell away.

"Ah, no," she said.

And sighing, she put her fingers on the switch of the engine, but could not bring herself to turn it at once.

"Mary," he asked, "are we far from home?"

"No. Only a little way."

"Then I shall leave you here, I think. Shall I?"

"Yes, please. . . . Yes . . . perhaps."

"Good-bye, my dear."

Her hand came to rest on his; and he took it up and kissed it.

"Good-bye, you dear, dear thing." He gave the hand a strong pressure, released it slowly, and left her.

A great white ship with three funnels moved away from her berth at Quebec, and put out into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The *Empress of the Isles* was leaving for England. Her passengers leaned on her rails to see the last of the tin sheds, the climbing roofs, and the peaks of the Château

Frontenac high in the sky. They waved to their friends on the quay. Or they stood there lonely and watched others waving. Lonely? *All* were lonely, those with the friends hardly less than the others. Cheery and facetious ones, or sorrowful and weeping ones, they could give no more than their fringes to these friends: each was a prisoner in the inescapable loneliness which was himself. And the ship carried them on: she was the active thing, and they passive in her power.

Antony was among them, and, like the others, was shut in with his thoughts. Well, she had been very sweet, and some of the glances of her eyes would hang in his mind with their riddle for ever. Had this ship not carried him away, he would have gone on with the enterprise, wondering if she were the answer to the old aching need. He would not have turned from her, in his own strength, as he turned from Jill Daubeney, years and years ago. Gosh, how many years ago was it? 1914—just as the war broke. Eleven years, and he was a young man then. Straightening himself at the deck-rail, he smiled to remember that intense youth who had turned in his own strength from the chance of a new love with Jill Daubeney. “I said, I remember: ‘No, I will *not* succumb to the old craving. I believe in it no more. I loved Honor once and it didn’t last; and I won’t try it out again. . . . I am free! I am free!’”

Had he been a fool in that hour? Or had he been wise? After all, Honor’s response to his love had been very dubious in the beginning; he had had to drag it out of her; and quickly it had sprung back to affection and companionship. With another it might have been different. “I don’t know. Anyhow, this time I have left it to the ship. The ship has decided for me.”

The ship was clearing the last of Quebec, and most of the people had dispersed to their unpacking. Through the windows of the lounge came the noise of the stewards laying the tea-tables, and the musicians tuning up their instruments, for it was four o’clock in the afternoon.

Suddenly he saw it all under the white light of reason: what a wild dream! a child of twenty, and a married man nearly forty who was a priest. But . . . The white light was quickly out, and he was living again that day in New York, searching in it for every word and every action of hers that had looked like the sap of love breaking into tiny leaf. Or

had they all meant nothing more than the attraction of a day? Perhaps she was flirting with him. But her "Ah, no," seemed to give the lie to that. It had been soft, but it had rung with real feeling. No, he must believe that something more than flirtation had moved in that dark car then. Oh, fool, fool! pull yourself together. Who would be at the mercy of one's imagination like this?

Yes, but one was.

The Gulf had widened, and Canada was passing by. A sea of watered silk lay between him and the wooded shore. Some islands appeared as if floating in still lakes; and they swung round in their water as the ship went on. Far away behind, and pale as the background of a water-colour, ran the line of the Laurentian mountains. Canada! He had seen no more than its gateway, but henceforth he was going to love the whole vast continent of it, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Great Lakes to Alaska.

Somewhere within it were the lakes of Western Ontario.

Fool.

Here was a bell-boy coming this way—was he going to speak to him? Yes, the child had a searching and purposeful air.

"The Reverend O'Grogan, sir?"

"Yes."

"A letter for you, sir."

"A letter?"

"Yes, sir. The mail's just been sorted."

Tony took the letter. The address was in a youthful hand, and the postmark was "New York." With a heart misbeating like a young lover's he tore the envelope and read:

"Dear Mr. O'Grogan,

"You see I remembered the ship you were going in and the time of its sailing and I thought I'd just like to be one of those who wished you a good voyage——"

"One of those!" Who else had done so?

"I did so enjoy that day in New York, it was lovely. I am writing this late at night so as to be sure of getting it off by an early mail in time for the boat. Oh, heck, I don't know what to say, I feel so dumb at half-after-one at night—all of which is good English. I

want you to know that I shall be thinking of you at the time the boat sails. I have not had a minute to write it before because I have been so terribly busy. I was dancing all last night !!!—

“Dancing?” With whom? Damn the man!

“Good-bye. I do hope we shall meet again some time, perhaps in England one day. I am reading your book and I think it so wonderful.

“Sincerely,

“Mary Leith.”

“Oh, I did enjoy that day! It was marvellous and I shall never never forget it.”

“I did so enjoy that day”—that was ordinary enough. But “I remembered the time of its sailing” and “I shall be thinking of you”—these were good. And best of all: “It was marvellous and I shall never never forget it”—Mary’s heart had forced that postscript from her. But—oh, fall of disappointment! “I have not had a minute to write it before because I have been so terribly busy.” Then she hadn’t spent the days thinking of him. Of course not. Why should she?

Ah, damn! One must be done with this foolishness. But not as with Jill; not of one’s own will, but because of the ship’s will. The ship was going on, and fast now: one could hear its continuing sigh through the tranquil water. He looked down, and saw the water foaming past the hull, and then fanning out behind in a wash of rhythmic undulations, that seemed to go on and on till they touched those shores of Canada, where the little white farmhouses stood among the maple and the spruce. Slowly he tore the letter across and across till it was in many pieces; and these he let fall from sad, unwilling fingers. The breeze took them, the Gulf received them, and the wash dandled them on its surface as long as they could be seen.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT STRIKE

HIS mind was quickly free of her. Home again in England, he sank back into the creation of a new book. A desire had waxed stronger in his life than the desire to create a perfect and enduring love, and it was the desire to create a perfect and enduring book, and, with it, a perfect and enduring fame. All things fed this altar now. He could even take pleasure in the failure of his marriage and the balking of his hunger when he saw them as fuel for the creation of some beautiful flame. He still sought the grand romance, looking for it in every woman's face; but not merely for its own sake now; he could think of it as an experience that would be of value to him as an artist. Yes, he was liberated from Mary, if he was seeking round for another face. Sometimes when his newspaper spoke of Canada or showed him a picture of New York, she would come out of her exile and quicken his tenderness, but he would be surprised that he could remember her features no more. He saw only an oval face and black hair parted in the middle, a long white neck and sloping shoulders. Had that hair been smooth or waving?

As in the war years, when he had set his pin-prick trouble in a vast canvas of quarrelling worlds and seen it more clearly than anything around it, so now England was shaping into a dark and important background behind him and his solitary thoughts. England was a scene overhung, not with the threat of war, but with the threat of revolution. Tony did not at first give the threat much interest or study; he had so little to spare from his books. But when an excitement lit up the first days of May, 1926, with a brilliance hardly less dazzling than that of the first days of August, 1914, he awoke to it with a thrill. And when it brightened to the certainty of conflict,

he rushed into it as eagerly as he had rushed into the brilliance of twelve years before.

Late on Friday night, the 30th of April, negotiations for peace in the coalfields broke down. The Government, the miners, and the mine-owners bowed to one another, and to this man and that, and went their separate ways. The Government went back into conclave. The miners went back to the Trades Union Conference, where Mr. J. H. Thomas told the delegates of all affiliated Unions that "they would shortly be called upon to make the most momentous decision that any body of Trade Unionists had ever been called upon to make." The mine-owners went back to their offices and issued their lock-out notices to come into force at midnight that night—it was like an echo of the midnight ultimatum of August 4, 1914.

Next morning was May Morning; and every colliery in Britain was silent. All the other industries were working, but only till such time as the order came for them to be silent too. And in his Thamesmouth home, Tony, sitting at his breakfast table, read with a quivering appreciation that the Navy was engaging in secret movements, its ratings held ready for use in an emergency, and special trains standing still in its dockyards. Not far from him, in Thamesmouth Town Hall, Alderman Scrase, Mayor of Thamesmouth, sat reading the circular letter of the Ministry of Transport, which detailed the arrangements made throughout the country for the maintenance of the essential services of food, fuel, water and light, "should the area of the dispute be so widened as to cause a stoppage in other industries."

May Day. Perhaps sentiment and superstition were not lacking in the men's leaders that they published on such a day their decision to call the General Strike. "The General Council of the Trades Union Congress," they proclaimed, "directs as follows: that the following trades and undertakings shall cease work as and when required by the General Council: railways, sea transport, docks, road transport, repair shops, printing trades, iron and steel, building, electricity and gas." The Government issued a Proclamation by the King. "George R.I. Whereas by the Emergency Powers Act, 1920, it is enacted that if it appears to Us that any action has been taken, or is immediately threatened, by any persons or body of persons of such a nature and on so extensive a scale as to be calculated, by interfering with the supply and distribution of

food, water, fuel and light, or with the means of locomotion, to deprive the community, or any substantial portion of the community, of the essentials of life, We may, by Proclamation, declare that a state of emergency exists: And whereas the present immediate threat of cessation of work in Coal Mines does, in Our opinion, constitute a state of emergency, within the meaning of the said Act: Now, therefore, We do, by and with the advice of Our Privy Council, hereby declare that a state of emergency exists."

Each document veiled the truth, since it was best to believe that we were all good Britons together; but the commanders behind these two shots knew that they were war and the acceptance of war; with blockade the weapon of one side, and the running of the blockade its answer. God send that these would be the only weapons. The Trades Union Council published a request to its million strikers "to remain quiet and orderly." The Government sent troops into South Wales, Lancashire and Scotland "to assist the police in the maintenance of order and the protection of life and property." And the wires from the continents buzzed with the news that the world was filling up the benches around our island circus, to sit there at ease and study the tourney. It gave us a grim pride in our notoriety. Some of the watching nations were good enough to say, and it was flattering, that, since a General Strike had to be tried out somewhere in this world of after-the-war, England was quite the best setting for the experiment, because the English with their stolidity and phlegm—they did not call it humour—would not be in a hurry to bring the machine-guns out of the arsenals.

At midnight on the third of May it began. The last hope of a settlement had died some hours before, when in the great newspaper works the operative printers, machine-minders, stereotypers, warehousemen and packers refused to handle the papers unless anti-strike matter were deleted; and on the editors rejecting this demand with contumely, five journals ceased publication. At that the Prime Minister, with a sigh for lost peace and the end of goodwill, broke off all negotiations with everybody; and the strike began. All leave was stopped in the Army and Navy. The Commissioner of Police called up all Special Constables to report for duty; and many good men, delighted at their sudden importance, donned blue uniforms, peaked caps and armlets, and hurried to their stations with the blessing of their wives. The trains finished their

journeys and stopped still. The trams and buses plied over their last route and went into their depots for a long sleep. The men came out of the gates. And next morning Hyde Park did not open to the public, but only to soldiers and to the drivers of lorries clanking with milk-churns ; for it was the Milk Pool of London.

In Thamesmouth Tony was out in the streets before his breakfast coffee had cooled in the jug. The streets presented the same excitement as on the first day of the Railway Strike some years before, only with an atmosphere more highly charged. So much more highly charged that he wondered why he had been excited about that mild little affair of the railways. That was a strike ; this might well be a revolution and a new England. Once again it seemed as if West Thamesmouth was streaming along the roadway in private cars, in lorries, in charabancs, on bicycles and on foot ; while East Thamesmouth, having downed tools, stood on the pavement with its hands in its pockets, and cheered. There could be no question that, at present, the dominant mood of everybody was, not anger, but fun. The pavement gave the roadway its satirical cheers or its laughing boos. And the roadway brandished hands in acknowledgment. Pedestrians hailed cars, no matter how packed they were and no matter how rickety, and the cars stopped and picked them up with a "Come on, then ! We can but bust." Some facetious cars bore such placards as "Welcome all," or "Get in, and be damned to you." A bright girl came into the streets provided with a large bill for an apron, "Please take me." She was immediately taken. A magnificent Rolls-Royce tourer enjoyed a personal triumph as it hummed along the High Street loaded with milk-churns. And some motor-cyclists, coming the opposite direction, from London, raised a quick interest and a cheer, for they raced like dispatch riders in time of war, with a label on their handle-bars, "T.U.C."

As before, Tony walked to the station to enjoy that silence which stretched from its gates to the furthest distances of its permanent way. Near the station was an ironmonger's shop ; and while Tony paused at its door, its proprietor, anxious to be delivered of much gossip on a day like this, came out for a

chat; and lo! it was Will Warner, the plump and merry man who had quarrelled so pleasantly with Joe Wylie in the tap-room of the "Running Horses."

"Of all the goddam fools," he said, "I am the goddamnedest."

"Why?" asked Tony.

Will shook his head humorously—sorrowfully; and though his hands were in his pockets, he rattled no money there.

"Yes, I am my own boss now; and I'm damned if I deserve to be."

"But why?"

"Because I didn't buy up all the oil stoves I could lay me hands on, and all the camp-beds and all the wireless sets. Then I'd have made my fortune. Here it is, nine o'clock in the morning, and I've sold every oil stove, cookin' and heatin', that I've got in the place. And I must a bin rung up for twenty more. And now they're beginning to inquire if I stock camp-beds."

"What do they want camp-beds for?"

"The gentlemen want them to sleep in overnight at their offices. Here I've had days and weeks to see this coming, and I never so much as thought that camp-beds would be a good line. What do you think of that?"

"I'm sure I shouldn't have foreseen it," said Tony.

"No, but then such things isn't in your line. I should have set down and thought, 'Now here's a strike coming, with no coal, no gas, no trains, no newspapers, no nothing. What'll everybody be bleating for? Let me get it all in straight-away.' But did I think of anything? Nothing at all. There's nothing extra in my shop that wasn't there a week ago. And if you don't call that a mutt's incompetence, I don't know what is. We shan't get a strike like this again."

Tony suggested that one could always hope.

"Yes, but they'll all be up to it next time," said Will. "Now wireless. Why didn't I say, 'No newspapers; that'll mean a boom in wireless—with everyone crazy for news, like they are. I'll fix up me agency rightaway.' The young fellow at the electricity shop says that he'd sold every set he'd got, before he'd been open ten minutes this morning, and now he's ringing up half England for more, but they're all sold everywhere, or wanted—even if they could get 'em down to him. Why, I haven't even got a set of me own, not having believed in wireless much, so far. I'm a mutt, I am."

Tony tried to remove the barbs from Will Warner's scourge,

but the plump ironmonger preferred to flog himself heartily. He wept for his profits which were not; and refused to be comforted.

"There's bicycles too. I might have seen that there'd be a big trade in bicycles. But there! if you haven't got the foresight of a beetle, you must pay for it. I tell you: I feel humiliated. Call me a business man! Am I? *Thump!* I'm going in for gardening."

Their attention was drawn from the shop and its lost possibilities by the passing of some small boys who ran across the road and up a side street, screaming "The Tahn'Awl! The Tahn'Awl." Older people hurried after them, no less interested, but much more dignified.

"Where are they going?" asked Tony.

"To the Town Hall," said Will.

"What's going to happen there?"

"Pfaw! nothing'll happen. The strikers are going to march past, just by way of saying How-d'ye-do to the Mayor and the Chief Constable; and then they'll march back where they came from."

"Which strikers? There are so many of them."

"The Transport blokes. The railwaymen and tramway-men and busmen. They've heard that the Mayor's said as how he'll have the corporation trams out of the depot if he has to drive the first of them himself. And they don't intend to let 'im; that's all. So they're marching past in power, and giving him this friendly nod. Least, that's what I've heard. They're forming up on the Recreation Ground now."

"But how does the Mayor propose to run the trams with no skilled drivers?"

"With volunteers, whom he'll train. He's in the Town Hall enrolling 'em now; and I think I shall enrol meself. I should be better at running a tram than running a shop."

"I shouldn't mind driving a tram," said Tony: and after bidding good-bye and good business to Will Warner, he walked towards the Town Hall, hardly less excited than the smallest of the street urchins. The only entertainment he saw in front of the Town Hall was a parade of policemen stretching the whole width of its railings; but this was a fine spectacle and rewarded his coming. A mounted sergeant and a mounted inspector walked their horses up and down in front of the parade. On the opposite pavement a considerable crowd of

civilians stood and gaped at the Town Hall, its yard, its railings and its line of policemen; while the urchins hopped and shouted in the gutter below.

"The tramwaymen are going to march past," volunteered a man standing next to Tony; for everyone was anxious to gossip with everyone else to-day.

"Yes," replied Tony; "but nothing will happen."

"I don't know," mused the man. "Old Scrase is a tough old cuss; and if it don't happen to-day, it'll happen to-morrow. He'll have those trams out, even if there's bloodshed."

"Where's he now?"

"Up there somewhere, with the Tramways Committee." The man nodded towards the windows of the Town Hall. "Thinking he's God Aw'mighty and equal to anything. And here come the boys."

A band was approaching from far down the street; and everyone in the watching crowd informed his neighbour of this fact, which was quite unnecessary. Then all of them quieted to await events. The line of constables looked straight in front of them, as if they heard no music; and the mounted officers continued to parade up and down before them. The many windows of the Town Hall looked over their heads, empty and unregarding. Tony looked up at those windows, half hoping that the face of Alderman Scrase would appear behind a pane. But it did not. No, one might have guessed that the old gentleman would not deign to observe any movement of the strikers. He would be feeling very much like an old French aristocrat when the sans-culottes came threatening his château. He would be engaged with his staff, preparing the battle. And without knowing it, and fully believing that he was sad and solemn indeed this morning, he would be enjoying himself quite as much as the smallest of the urchins hopping in the gutter.

The band was now level with Tony's eyes; it went by with a blare of brass, and the long column of strikers passed. There must have been five hundred of them; and they marched in good order, four abreast, and shepherded by mounted policemen. Many were wearing their trade union badges; some had red rosettes, and nearly all displayed their war medals, beautifully polished that morning. They might have been the old 15th Royal West Essex marching in mufti. In the last file of all, among those who could only have been sympathizers,

he saw Joe Wylie limping along on his brackety legs, with his bowler hat pushed back on his hair, his medals arrayed and shining on his breast, and assuredly the largest rosette of the muster blooming in his buttonhole.

The next day, Tony, a-fidget for adventure, took his car through the early morning to London, that he might pick up and help on their way some of the thousands of working girls who were being compelled to trudge from their homes to the City. For old times' sake he set his course for Kensington; and, once in Kensington High Street, he saw that he could hardly have chosen a better district for the plying of his amateur taxi. The pavements of that great artery into London were two black rivers of men and girls flowing eastward on weary feet to the City. He had seen nothing like it since he watched the great retreat of the French civilians before the drive of the enemy in March, 1918. It was as if a nation moved one way. None of the red buses were in the roadway between the streaming pedestrians, but the private cars, lorries, charabancs, carts, motor-cycles, and pedal cycles bowled along, all loaded to breaking strain with laughing and cheering passengers. The laughter was mostly in the vehicles, the trampers on the pavement being too footsore and weary to laugh. Some of these vehicles bore improvised labels proclaiming their destination, so that pedestrians desiring a lift might know which of them to hail. Tony's empty tourer, labelled "Any Old Where," was immediately hailed; and he crowded eight girls on to its seat, its floor and its hood, and felt its springs protesting as he turned it into the eastward flow. He passed Hyde Park, with its closed gates and policemen at sentry-stations before them, and, glancing through the railings, saw the milk churns assembled in battalions on the grass, the lorries parked in columns along the roadways, the hutments going up under the plane trees, and the telephone men climbing the trunks to festoon their wires from branch to branch. One by one he dropped his girls at points from Piccadilly to Cannon Street, picking up others as the seats became free. One of the girls offered him a sixpenny tip, which he declined with unoffended laughter; and another offered him a kiss, which he did not decline.

During the body of the day he drove his car in the East-end and Dockland, not without a hope of witnessing some scenes a little less peaceful than those in the West and the City. Alarmists told him that he was a fool to venture into these parts with his blackleg car, as the dockers were in ugly temper and had already smashed up cars unprotected by the letters, "T.U.C." But nothing in the grey streets justified this tale; they were merely the streets of East Thamesmouth over again, only more squalid and more thickly populated. Idle men stood everywhere; slatternly women gossiped shrilly at their doors; and barefoot children, infected by the excitement in the air, ran screaming about their play. A silence, as of Sunday, possessed the workshops, warehouses, factories and dockyards; while a liveliness, as of Bank Holiday, filled the people's homes and overflowed on to pavement, yard and alley. At every strike head-quarters which he passed he saw bills displayed in the windows: "Keep calm. Keep cool. Don't congregate." On plots of waste land he saw football in progress, or stump cricket; for it was May, and between the seasons. In one street he saw a coster's family setting out in a cart for a day in the fields. The only warlike thrill that slumland gave him was a march-past of the Guards on their way to the docks, with their band at their head playing "Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag and smile, smile, smile."

Thursday, the third day of the strike, there was interest enough in the Thamesmouth streets to hold him there. The air was full of rumours that the Mayor would bring out the trams to-day, himself at the controlling handle of the first. All idle feet were hurrying into Capital Road, where the red wall and closed gates of the Tramway Depot faced the Recreation Ground. Here, for a quarter of a mile north and south of the depot's gates, the pavements and roadway were thronged with talkative people, whom police, on foot or on horseback, were "moving on."

"Move on, there! Keep moving, please. There's nothing going to happen to-day."

Some of the wags in the crowd called out their old army cries, "Get a move on now. . . . Lift your feet up. . . . Break step. . . ." But others of the men only "moved on" sullenly, their fists asleep in their pockets. Policemen patrolled before the red wall of the depot, and a noise of hammering came from the yard and the sheds behind.

Walking back, since nothing seemed likely to break the peace of Capital Road, Tony was surprised to see paper-boys running down the High Street, shouting "Message from Prime Minister." There had been no newspapers in Thamesmouth for the last two days, except a *Daily Telegraph* reduced to two quarto pages, and an *Evening News* typewritten on a single sheet of foolscap; which two astonishing publications had induced the wits to assert that their next issues would appear in manuscript, and on toilet paper. Tony stopped a boy and bought two journals, neither of which he had ever seen before. One was *The British Gazette*, and the other *The British Worker*. He quickly scanned them—oh, yes, he had heard something about this: *The British Gazette* was the new Government organ, produced at the offices of *The Morning Post*, whose presses were still working; and *The British Worker* was the answer of the Trades Union Congress, published at the offices of *The Daily Herald*, which could still command its men. Amateur strike-breakers were conveying the Government paper all over the country in their private cars; and the vehicles labelled "T.U.C." were systematically distributing the Trade Union sheet to every strike centre.

The two papers were like the General Routine Orders of army days.

Standing on the kerb, Tony read the Prime Minister's message in *The British Gazette*: "Constitutional Government is being attacked. Let all good citizens whose livelihood and labour have thus been put in peril bear with fortitude and patience the hardships with which they have been so suddenly confronted. Stand behind the Government, who are doing their part, confident that you will co-operate in the measures they have undertaken to preserve the liberties and privileges of the people of these islands. The laws are in your keeping. You have made Parliament their guardian. The General Strike is a challenge to Parliament, and the road to anarchy and ruin." He read also that, in their match against Warwickshire, Lancashire had scored 179, and 180 for six wickets, declared; Watson making 60, not out, and Quaife taking 4 for 13.

In *The British Worker* he read: "Do make everyone understand that this is an industrial, not a political dispute. It concerns Wages, Decent Conditions of Life, Fair Methods of Negotiation; not the Constitution, nor the Government,

nor the House of Commons. Do all you can to keep everybody smiling; the way to do that is to smile yourself. Do your best to discountenance any ideas of violent or disorderly conduct. Do any odd jobs that want doing about the house. Do a little to interest and amuse the kiddies now you have the chance. Do what you can to improve your health; a good walk every day will keep you fit. Do *something*. Hanging about and swapping rumours is bad for everybody."

After the Tramway Depot the next most interesting building to stare at was the Town Hall—indeed Town Hall and Depot, though half Thamesmouth lay between them, seemed to be partners fronting each other over the roofs in a mutual determination that the trams should come out. Tony walked to the Town Hall. A fleet of cars stood backed against the kerb, each with its gentleman owner at its wheel, wearing the brassard of a special constable. Some loiterers stood on the opposite pavement and gazed at these cars, which were waiting, as everyone knew, to rush a flying squad of regular constables to any quarter of the town where disorder might threaten. A new notice, pasted on the board of the Town Hall, drew Tony across the road to study it. He read:

COUNTY BOROUGH OF THAMESMOUTH

Men possessing the requisite health, strength and vigour are earnestly requested to join the Special Constabulary and assist the Regular Police in the maintenance of law and order during the present emergency. Special Constables who sustain injury in the execution of their duty, and widows and children in case of death, will be granted pensions, allowances and gratuities.

Candidates may present themselves for enrolment at the Central Police Station, Town Hall, Thamesmouth.

JAMES HITCHCOCK,
Chief Constable.

Chief Constable's Office, Town Hall, Thamesmouth. 6th May, 1926.

Tony was just reading this a second time when he saw Mr. Broadley descending the steps of the Town Hall. He went to meet him at the gates.

"I am going on strike, Vicar. In other words, I am going to leave your employ for a little while and become a Special Constable."

"Quite right; quite right," agreed the Vicar enthusiastically. "I think you're perfectly right. We must all do something at a time like this. Yes, you do it, my boy; I feel it will be

a great satisfaction to our people. I've just been in there, seeing Scrase myself and asking what I and the Church can do. There's a great responsibility on us at this time. I feel that, as Mayor's Chaplain, I ought to—to do something. I'm starting daily Intercession Services at once, but don't you worry about them, my boy; *I'll* take them if you are kept by your duties. I wish I had something else I could do."

"I'll tell you something else you can do, Vicar."

"What's that?"

"Drive the second tram, when they all come out of the depot. If the Mayor drives the first, and the Mayor's Chaplain the second, in cassock and bands, it'll be really picturesque."

"I wouldn't mind doing it at all," said Mr. Broadley, "if it would do any good. In fact, I think it's an idea—without the cassock, of course—ha, ha! It would be a gesture—a gesture to the men. Do you think it would do any good?"

"I think it would do much more good to pray at the Intercession Services than he *doesn't* bring them out. Pray that he's visited by a slight indisposition and confined to his bed for a week."

"But why? I think he's perfectly right, I *must* say."

"He may be right, but he's damned unwise. Surely his business as Chief Magistrate is to do all that he can to preserve order, not to go out of his way to provoke a conflict."

"Well, I don't know. . . ." Mr. Broadley had become a little chary of arguing with his curate ever since the world had paid such tribute to "Sanders" and the other books. Without admitting it to himself, he was afraid of O'Grogan and accepted his genial ascendancy. "Anyhow, he's determined to have them out. He can talk about little else. He says it is a necessary gesture."

"I know. And that's why I think we'd better all become policemen. I'm going to enrol now."

"Quite right. Splendid. It's your duty, I'm sure of it."

"Is it? I don't know. To be perfectly frank, Vicar"—somehow Mr. Broadley always affected Tony with an itch to speak the laughing truth, as if he had sipped a drop of Sanders' wine—"I don't think I'm doing this in an appetite for duty, but in an appetite for excitement. Which is more than half true of the Mayor and Corporation as well, if they only knew it. Well, let's within, and learn our task."

Thereupon he left the Vicar, entered the Town Hall and

presented himself in a Committee Room for enrolment. The enrolling officer gave him a truncheon, an armlet and a warrant, and instructed him to go home and wait there till he received his summons to duty.

"Yessir!" answered Tony, assuming at once the briskness of the army. He almost clicked his heels before turning about.

"Oh, and wait a minute," called the officer. "When you go on duty, keep the truncheon in your pocket, out of sight."

"I see, sir. Thank you."

"Yes; we don't want to be provocative. Good morning."

At home, after he had arrested Honor on the authority of his warrant, and demanded of Paston, the servant, why the devil he wasn't on strike like all other good men, he went into his study and sat there, announcing dramatically that he mustn't leave his chair till he had received the summons to duty and to danger.

It came by the evening post in a gratifying envelope, stamped "On Police Service":

"Dear Sir,

"You will please report for duty at the Town Hall, Thamesmouth, at 10 a.m. to-morrow, and at the same hour each succeeding day, until further instructed. You will remain on duty for four hours. Uniform (if any) and equipment will be worn.

"Yours faithfully,

"N. Davis Gunther,

"Chief Inspector, 'A' Division."

CHAPTER IV

THE AFFRAY IN CAPITAL ROAD

ON reporting at the Town Hall next morning, he was told to wait in "that room over there." "You'll find a lot of other specials there. Barney, show this gentleman the Recreation Room." A boy scout led him across the marble floor of this first landing; and their footsteps echoed in the roof above the well of the staircase. The boy scout pushed open one of two high double-doors; and Tony, passing through, exchanged the cold emptiness of the passages and galleries for an atmosphere blue with smoke, hot with breath, and noisy with men's voices. Sixty or seventy "specials" were waiting here. They lolled in the window-seats with newspapers and magazines, or stood about in talkative groups, or sat at card tables with draughts and dominoes and chess. Nearly all were in the browns and greys of mufti, with nothing to show the power that invested them except the striped brassards on their left arms and the truncheons which peeped from their pockets. A few, and these seemed very old men, were in the long blue overcoats and peaked blue caps of their war-time service. Tired and gentle old tradesmen they seemed, who could have been useful for little, even so many years ago, except to wait for the throb of enemy aircraft overhead and then warn the householders to take to their cellars. A majority of the new, un-uniformed volunteers were middle-aged men, already grey: gentlemen of substance and leisure from the homes of West Thamesmouth. Some of them, however, were slim young dandies: probably the children of the same houses. One or two, in shabby clothes and mufflers, may have been recruits from the unemployed.

Tony, entering and sitting on the edge of a table, received a distinct impression as of old halberdiers dicing and smoking

on the battle eve, and all unaware that an enchanter had changed their fashion into the fashion of men ten centuries hence.

A quiet grey-haired man shared the table's edge with him and soon opened a conversation. He was a retired colonel, it appeared: and he pleased Tony much, for, though he disliked the strike, he had no hot-headed vindictiveness against the strikers.

"I am with the miners all the way," said he, "but this general strike is a blunder."

"Absolutely," agreed Tony. "Absolutely."

"And their leaders know it," continued the Colonel. "You can read between the lines of their speeches and their writings that they know they've let loose too much. MacDonald knows it; Jim Thomas knows it; they all know it, except A. J. Cook. And, frankly, I'm sorry for it. It'll do the miners no good; and their case was excellent; and it'll hit the Trade Union movement a blow from which it won't recover for years."

"Absolutely," said Tony.

"Aren't you at the Parish Church?" asked the Colonel suddenly.

"Yes."

"Antony O'Grogan, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. I've read your books."

Tony was more than ever pleased with the Colonel.

Their conversation was broken by the entrance of the Chief Inspector, who formed them in two rows, picked out a slender young man of military carriage, who was a guardee subaltern on leave, and placed him in command of the whole detachment.

"Lick 'em into some sort of shape," he said; and went out.

The young subaltern was both lively and bashful: he reminded Tony almost painfully of Childe Harold and young Carder.

"Look here," he informed his parade, blushing to his fair hair and clearing his throat, "he's told me to put you through some drill. Sorry, and all that. Can't think why he chose me when there are such a lot of you who are much older, and all that, but—oh damn! you see what I mean. Number off!"

Tony, standing in the front rank next the Colonel, shouted "Twelve!" after the Colonel's "Eleven!" and, when the company was put through some elementary drill—forming fours, re-forming two-deep, moving to the right in

column of fours—he remarked, out of the side of his eye, the crispness with which the Colonel moved. A like soldierly smartness in most of the grey-haired men made him wonder how many colonels, majors, and admirals, perchance, the subaltern was forming into fours. They seemed to rejoice in putting themselves under the command of a boy, if their country demanded it. And, unknown to themselves, they were as happy as boys in this make-believe game of being privates.

“That’ll do,” shouted the subaltern. “Not bad. Some of you have done this before—what? That old war, I guess. Well, we shall march to the Drill Hall to do some pukka drill later on—what? All damn silly, I dare say; because nothing’ll happen, probably; but you never know: we may have to charge like one o’clock and clean up the town. I rather hope so, myself—not that we’re to be provocative, as the Chief says—but—oh damn! you see what I mean: I shouldn’t like all you gentlemen to have come here for nothing. . . . Righto, men. Dismiss.”

They dismissed and returned to their tables or their talkative groups. Tony found himself in a cluster of hot-heads whose note was very different from the Colonel’s, or, indeed, from that of the majority, who, if less liberal than he, were men of quietness and restraint. These were loud young men, fleshy in person and flashy in dress; and it was nothing but Tony’s combativeness which had driven him to join their argument.

“The trouble’ll begin when the trams come out,” said one of them, a fatuous youth with a surly moon face.

“Yes; and may it be soon!” suggested another.

“And may I be there!” shouted a hefty young bully with black hair oiled and curled and a suit of plus-fours peculiarly offensive. He was of the type that must always shout down everyone else. “I want to get my knock at the blighters, and the sooner the better. I said to the Chief when I enlisted, I said, ‘I hope you’ll send me somewhere where there’s trouble.’ I’m in the mood to see red.”

“Same here,” grumbled another. “A few cracks on the nut’ll teach ’em whether their Emperor Cook is going to boss this country or not.”

“Cook? *Cook?*” scoffed the bully, “I’d string him up to a yard-arm, if I had my way. What we want is a Gen’ral Dyer, who wouldn’t be afraid to get ’em in a crowd and open

fire with his machine-guns on 'em. That'd put enough of the fear of God into 'em to last 'em a year or two. But they know we're too soft."

"And thank God for that," said Tony quietly.

"Eh?" The speaker turned on him. "What? Thank God for what?"

"That we're as soft as you say," repeated Tony, his brow heating. "Only I should substitute 'civilized' for 'soft.' Thank God we're not at all losing our heads like you."

The man seemed bewildered that anyone should be holding a different view from his; and his lips stammered before he could reply. Tony was turning away, but a bully no more likes to lose a victim than a cat likes to lose a mouse; and the stammerer, touching the lapel of Tony's coat, jerked out: "Well, what the hell have you joined up to fight 'em for?"

"Fight them? I don't know what you're talking about. I've joined this crowd to assist in the preservation of justice, not to fight anybody."

"Well, then, I have!" said the stutterer.

"So I gather. . . ."

This was a palpable sneer; and the face of the bully crimsoned. He thrust his head forward and held under Tony's eyes the buttonhole of his jacket, in which was a little medallion engraved "B.F." "See that? Well, I'm one of the British Fascisti, and I don't care who knows it. And we're reckoning that this bloody strike'll just about double our numbers; and before your Emperor Cook takes command we'll see what a little of the Mussolini touch can do. Yes . . . just you make sure of that."

Tony stared down at the badge, unblinking. "B.F.," he said. "That might stand for anything."

"*What's* that?" A laugh at his expense had turned the bully into a bull. He lowered his head further and brought it closer to Tony's face, as if he would butt his brows with it. "You call me a fool, do you? You as good as call me a Bloody Fool?"

"I did not," said Tony. "But I think it unwise to go about labelled like that."

The fist of the bully swung for a blow, but Tony caught him by the wrist and quite easily forced his hand downward. Tony's muscles were powerful compared with those in the flabby arm of his attacker. "I call you a fool now," he said,

still holding the wrist and letting the man feel the strength of his grip, "since you can't argue without coming to blows. And don't think everybody's overawed by your shouting, because they're not!" He flung the wrist away from him, as something that interested the company no further.

"Come away, Charlie," advised one of his friends. "Don't you know who you're talking to? He's one of the ministers at St. Wilfrid's."

"He? Him a minister?" exclaimed Charlie. "Hur—no wonder he's so soft then. A minister, is he?"

"*And* a very famous author," offered the Colonel, who had joined the group standing round.

"What do I care what he is?" sneered Charlie. But he obviously did care. Like all bullies he was alarmed to think he had attacked somebody who might prove to be of account.

"*And* an ex-middle-weight champion of Oxford," added the Colonel, in a wise effort of the imagination.

"What do I care what he is?" repeated Charlie.

"Yes, that's why they asked him to join the Special Constables," the Colonel explained further.

"What do I care what he is? He didn't join 'em to come it over me——"

"Fall in! Fall in, men," called the voice of the young commander. "We're going to march to the Drill Hall."

Charlie drifted off with his friends, and Tony heard him mutter: "Well, that's saved him a thick ear, I reckon. The fellow's sammy."

They marched through the streets to the Drill Hall of the old Fifteenth. And as they formed fours, and left-turned, and left-wheeled, and marched with swinging arms round and round its asphalt floor, the girdered roof echoing the tramp of their feet and the commands of their captain, Tony imagined the parade of twelve years ago, when the men who were to be *his* men assembled here; and the voice of Kit Scrase called under this roof to the lads of C Company, and the voice of Colonel Tappiter yelled to the battalion to march; and with a shouting of subalterns and a tramping of feet the battalion, a thousand strong, marched away—marched to camp and to ship-board and to Mudros, till they met *him*, many months later, on the bluffs of Gallipoli. Most of that thousand were under the soil of Gallipoli or Sinai or France now; or, if they were still alive, were in the ranks of the strikers, arrayed against

him and his class. . . . No, it didn't fit somehow; the picture wasn't right; it was a distorted picture of their feelings for one another.

He did his first piece of real police duty the next morning. The Inspector, coming into the Recreation Room, detailed him to attach himself to a young regular constable and go to the depot of the Estuary Omnibus Company, where they were to stand on guard over the main gates. He found the regular in the passage, a huge round-cheeked Essex ploughboy; and together they walked off to the closed gates in Norton Road, and stood side by side before them. The regular, some twenty years old, was clad in his neat, standardized uniform of blue, with broad black army boots for his base; the special, nearing forty, was clad in an exceedingly well-cut suit of grey, with precise brown shoes on his feet. And the regular was the master, the special the man. The regular did not speak much, but stared vacantly in front of him, and, if questioned by his assistant, replied only "Yes, sir," and "No, sir." The special, abandoning conversation, stared at the traffic in the road.

This traffic was a panorama of excitement. It was good to see a Government provision lorry go rattling by, with an amateur youth at the wheel and a policeman at his side. It was good to see another provision lorry go by, with an amateur woman at the wheel and a grinning policeman guarding this delicate charge. It was good to watch the passing of a blackleg omnibus, crowded inside and out, with a policeman by the driver's seat and a policeman on the conductor's platform. It was better still when a second omnibus passed with its windows smashed. There was a thrill in the passing of a doctor's car which bore on its wind-screen a label with a red cross and the words "Doctor's Car." And best of all was when the Flying Squad rushed past in answer to an S O S from somewhere. With intermittent hooting and a steady roar, car after car tore by, each laden with policemen, on seats, on hood, and on footboard. One of these police cars was driven by a girl. Hard behind this pageant, and walking with a very quick step, went Mrs. Joe Wylie, her golden hair taking the wind with beauty, and her face strained with anxiety lest she were too late to see the fun. Tony laughed. It would be a dinner from the shop for Joe Wylie this morning. But perhaps Joe took no dinner in these stirring days. It

was certainly just about dinner-time when Tony saw him, complete with medals and red rosette, hastening along to his duties. Tony called after him, and immediately doubted whether this hearty greeting was permissible in a policeman on duty. Joe stopped, recognized him, and came up.

"Gaw, sir! I never thought to see you in arms against us."

"I'm not in arms against you, Joe. I'm keeping you in order, that's all."

"*And* you'll be wanted, sir," Joe affirmed triumphantly. "You only wait till the Mayor brings out his trams! *That's* when the fair'll begin—yes, sir, rahnd-abahts, swings and all! *And* the coco-nut shies, you bet. I only hope, sir"—Joe's hand covered his moustache, for a jest was emerging—"that *your* head isn't one of the coco-nuts."

"Why, what's going to happen when the trams come out?"

"I shouldn't like to say, sir. But all the boys are standing by for that, and for nothing else. If the Mayor makes his gesture, they're going to make theirs. There's gestures and gestures, you see. I wouldn't say as I shouldn't heave a brickbat or two meself."

The young regular stared in front of him, as if he heard and saw nothing.

"Better be careful what you're saying, Joe; or my friend here will arrest you."

"'Im? 'Im?" Joe turned to the constable and addressed him. "Yuss: you're a fine fellow, you are! 'Takin' the pay of the capittalists, and fighting for them against your own class! Ain't that what you're doing?"

"I dessay you're about right, mate," answered the young constable, rather to Tony's dismay.

"You agree, do you?"

"Sometimes I think like that."

"Well, then! *Well*, then! Why don't you come out and join us, and bring your pals too? There's quite a lot of coppers that thinks the same, ain't there?"

"I dessay there's a few, chum."

"*Well*"—Joe appealed to him, as to his manhood—"why don't you get together and do something about it?"

"It's not too easy, chum."

"Gammon! You can but lose your job, and *we'll* see that

no one's victimized after this—you can bet your boots on that. We'll see that all them as has suffered for the Cause ain't out of a job. It's worth thinking about, ain't it?"

"Yes. . . . I expect you're about right, mate."

"Hell, Joe!" Tony burst into this duologue. "I suppose you know you're committing a considerable crime—'inciting to mutiny'—or whatever they call it. In Germany you'd have had the bracelets on your wrists for half of what you've said. Disaffecting His Majesty's Forces like that! Leave it alone, and tell us one of your funny stories instead. You'll feel better then."

Tony's invitation was not one that Joe could have resisted. "Well, sir, did I ever tell you this one?" His hand showed a tendency to rise towards his moustache. "There's a cove of an engine-driver, who's bin taking his train up to London every morning—he's a dirty scab, of course, but we'll let that pass—and when he gets into Fenchurch Street, he stands by his engine with his cap in his hand, and all the gents, being that grateful to him, pour in their bank-notes, and gold tie-pins and God-knows-what-all; and now, sir, he's got enough to retire on; and he's going to buy an engine for himself, and set up on his own."

Tony threw back his head and laughed; and even the young regular grinned. Joe's eyes twinkled.

"Yes, he's going to set up on his own! And did I ever tell you this one, sir; it's the best that's going the rounds? There was one of those amatewer drivers, a young stoddent from Oxford, and he brought up the Scotch express from Edinburgh to Euston in record time. And all the Directors, and General Managers, and Station Masters come out on to the platform to shake his hand and congratulate him; but he said, 'Down't you congratulate me, for Christ's sake! It wasn't till I was a mile from Euston that I discovered how to stop the bloody thing.'"

This story was a great success with the police; and Joe, such was his inveterate habit, immediately repeated its point. "Yuss: 'Down't congratulate me,' he says. 'It wasn't till I was a mile from Euston that I discovered how to stop the bloody thing.' . . . Well that's enough lies for this morning, sir. I must be awf."

With a cheerful good-bye, he left them and hurried away on his stocky legs, to find more of the day's entertainment.

The young regular making no comment, Tony was moved to ask :

“Then you are in sympathy with the strike?”

“No, sir. I don’t think so, sir.”

“But you said you agreed with him?”

“Oh, we always agree with them. We’re told to; it saves a row.”

Tony contemplated this remarkable statement; and the constable added in an afterthought :

“Of course if there was a crowd listening we’d have to do something about it.”

When their period of duty was over they returned to the Police Station in the Town Hall, and the special went upstairs to the Recreation Room. The long room was empty, and he sat himself in a window-seat with a newspaper that he had picked up. It was a copy of the *Continental Daily Mail*, which could still circulate in England, because it was printed in Paris and brought over by aeroplane. What news of the strike in the world beyond Thamesmouth? The lead story told him : “Organization is steadily overcoming confusion. The daily life of Great Britain is being kept going by the good temper, common sense and remarkable resourcefulness of the public. There were one or two cases of rowdyism directed against the omnibuses in outlying London suburbs, but no serious troubles are reported from anywhere.” The next column gave him the comments of a New York journal. “Great Britain is facing to-day the stark fact of an attack on her organized life. The Government must use all its resources to win the fight, even though this means employing the Army and Navy and opening fire on the mob.”

Thamesmouth filled its streets next morning, because rumour was in the air. Every man was telling every other man, whether friend or stranger, that “the trams were coming out to-day.” The rumour was started, perhaps, or it was strengthened, by the sight of a Red Cross Aid Post, with four nurses, established in one of the tramway shelters, not two hundred yards from the depot. All the bolder loafers and merrier larrikins hastened to the stretch of Capital Road between the depot and the Recreation Ground, and dawdled there, so as to be in the

front seats when that majestic performance opened, The Exit of the Trams. Probably some of them hoped to obtain small parts in the performance, as supers in the crowd or, at the least, as "noises off." Less enthusiastic people, who preferred the alarmist complexion, declared that they would not stay in the neighbourhood of the depot for twenty pounds; and they lined themselves instead along the pavements at the lower reaches of Capital Road where it curved away from the depot and ran to meet the sea. Other persons who were really timid, asserted that it would be best to give the whole district as wide a berth as possible, since the police would arrest at sight, if one didn't "move on," and it would soon be impossible to "move on" because of the crowds jamming in Capital Road.

In the Recreation Room the specials, though honoured with no more information than the throngs outside, guessed that *something* was going to happen, because they had been ordered to muster in their strongest force and "stand by" against an emergency call. And they knew that the gentlemen drivers of the Flying Squad cars were "sitting by," with their engines warmed and ready.

They read newspapers and chatted, or played cards and draughts, for an hour; and nothing happened. Tony asked of his friend the Colonel, "Got any idea what's in the wind?"

"Only yarns," replied the Colonel. "But I don't believe we're going to be asked to do anything more serious than escort the volunteers into the depot."

"What volunteers?"

"Those who are to man the trams when, in the fullness of time and the mercy of God, they do come out."

"But why do the volunteers want an escort? What's to stop 'em going in?"

"A few hundred railway men and tramway men, with their hobbledehoy supporters. Peaceful picketing, my boy, five hundred strong. They're determined that no scabs shall enter the depot, and the Mayor is determined that they shall. It's a gesture, my boy; a gesture."

They sat on tables and kicked their heels for a further hour; and then Superintendent Jackson, of "A" Division, entered.

"Fall in along the roadway outside," he called. "Truncheons out of sight, please."

Crowding to the door, they funnelled out. They crossed

the Town Hall yard and passed on to the road. Ah, here was pageantry. A hundred foot police, paraded two deep, stood facing the Town Hall; a score of mounted regulars stood flank to flank beside them, their sleek bay horses tossing their heads; beyond the regulars, flank to flank as they, a score of mounted specials or "auxiliaries"—and the horses of these men varied in height and colour, because their riders were gentlemen from country estates, or grooms from local stables, who had brought their own mounts; beyond these a squad of civilians in their mufti—and these were the volunteers, the men of the moment, the principals to this fine chorus; and beyond the volunteers, last item of all, significant, rather sinister, the Police Ambulance. The Chief Constable, a small figure in neat blue jacket, riding breeches and shining black leggings, paced up and down before his long parade, or halted to exchange a word with his superintendents.

"Here come some more," whispered the Colonel to Tony, who was standing beside him in the front rank of "A" Division.

Tony sent his eye along the unmilitary slant of the Colonel's glance and saw forty or fifty regulars filtering in single file out of a large empty house on the right of the Town Hall. There a force of regulars had been billeted day and night, throughout the whole of this week, so as to be ready for a sudden call. When these men had paraded on the far side of the ambulance van, the Chief Constable said a last word to his superintendents; and the superintendents, leaving him, came to the front of their divisions and spoke.

Superintendent Jackson, standing almost face to face with Tony, shouted: "Listen, men; we are going to march to Capital Road to escort these volunteers into the tramways depot. We have reason to suppose that a crowd of many hundreds of strikers intends to offer some resistance, more or less peaceful, to their entry, and we hope that the sight of such a strong force as this will deter them from any such rash action. Probably there will be no resistance. We hope not. And all special constables kindly understand that on no account are you to strike first, and, if humanly possible, you had best not strike at all. On the other hand, you will immediately arrest any man who assaults you, or interferes with you in the execution of your duty, or whom you see throwing stones or inciting others to riot. If, unfortunately, you are compelled

to make such an arrest you will immediately convey your prisoner into the ambulance van or into the depot, whichever may be the nearer. Thank you. That will do. Right turn."

The Chief Constable, seeing that the superintendents had finished their addresses, walked quickly to the side of the foot police, who were to head the column, gave the column its order to march, and led it himself, on foot. The onlookers, who had multiplied on the pavements, immediately made two more processions and, marching along the pavements, accompanied the police with rapid, irregular steps. Small boys, who had never been so happy in their lives, scurried in the gutters and whooped. Heads shot out of windows, and curious sightseers came running down the side streets, in terror lest they should be late. One hurrying man, pestered by a squalling child for information and a view, hoisted her on to his shoulder, where she rode, perfectly placid, with a finger in her mouth and her eyes on the marching men.

"Damn! They might have given us a drum and fife band," whispered the Colonel. "We shan't get a half big enough crowd this way. And a few pipers wouldn't have come amiss."

Cheered by many, booed by a few, and gaped at by all, the column marched down the High Street, and, swinging through Wilton Lane, came to the seaward end of Capital Road. Marching up Capital Road, and rounding the curve which hid the depot from view, it saw a dense mass of people packed between the railings of the Recreation Ground and the depot's red wall. They were mostly men and youths, but one could descry a few women, of whom some even carried their babies in shawls. Schoolboys had climbed the railings of the Recreation Ground so as to be able to stare, over the heads of the crowd, at the shut and silent depot. And since the Recreation Ground sloped upward from the road, a second crowd had taken its stand on the higher parts, where it could enjoy a good view and the protection of the railings. Over this crowd, like monkeys over the undergrowth, the urchins hung from the pole of the giant-stride and from the supports of the horizontal bar, or perched themselves precariously on the cross-beam of the swings. Two or three bestrode the parallel bars.

A low roar, not of welcome to the Chief Constable but of information to one another, went up from this multitude as the police turned the bend.

The Chief Constable halted the column. Mounted police would be too dangerous a tool for opening a channel through that crowd, since its members, packed together, would be unable to draw back from the horses' hooves. He consulted with his superintendents. Then he shaped all his foot police, regulars and specials, into a wedge-formation, himself its point, and its base wide enough to stretch from pavement to pavement. The mounted regulars fell behind this wedge, with the volunteers in their centre like prisoners of war. The mounted auxiliaries fell behind the regulars, and acted as flank guards to the ambulance van. The formation was now arrow-shaped, with the wedge for its arrow-head, and the Chief Constable for the sharp point.

"Right."

The Chief was satisfied. With no weapon in his hand, he faced towards the depot, and the formation went forward. It penetrated the fringe of the crowd, punctured its solid circumference, and forged towards its heart. Tony could hear the Chief calling upon the people to disperse and use no violence. The movement was succeeding. The nearest people drew back from the police, and the furthest gave ground, contenting themselves with shouted sneers and abuse. Tony supposed that they would win to the depot through this snarling calm—when, suddenly, far away behind, one of the auxiliaries' horses, unused to police service, reared and brought a hoof down on to the back of an elderly man, throwing him to the ground.

The tinder ignited at that spot, the fire spread, and the riot was ablaze. There was a rush; and Tony had barely apprehended what was happening when he was separated from his fellows and in the midst of a surging crowd of men. He heard voices: "Come on, boys; let 'em have it!" "Go for the dirty specials!" "We can wipe these b——s off the face of the earth." "Yah! Make a meal off 'em!" "Come on, the Reds!" He heard a distant rumour of boos, a sibilance of hisses, and the intermittent screams of women. He saw a fusillade of stones fired from the summits of the Recreation Ground. He heard a clattering behind, like the rattle of a stampede, and, quickly turning his head, saw the horses of the auxiliaries galloping away, as if they had all taken fright and discharged themselves from further police duty. He saw no more, for now the men were striking at his face and tearing

at his clothes. He disobeyed orders, neither arresting anyone nor summoning assistance. He did not even draw his truncheon. He just maintained a smile, protected himself with his arms, and told them not to be damned fools. Only when one man tried to tear off his armlet did he use any considerable force to throw him off. The main mass of the crowd must have surged away from him now, for a mounted regular cantered up and dispersed his assaulters; and for a moment he stood alone. In that moment he was just thinking, "I don't know what use I've been; perhaps I drew the fire of one or two," when he heard angry shouts and screams in the Recreation Ground, and, throwing his glance that way, saw that the auxiliaries had galloped round a side street, attacked it in the rear, and were now cantering among the swings, giant-stride, and parallel bars, while the people scattered before them. Near by he saw two specials dragging an unwilling prisoner to the ambulance van; and, further away, two regulars, better skilled in these affairs, frog-marching their gentleman to the same cell.

And in the furthest distance he saw the Chief Constable's wedge still driving forward to the gates of the depot.

Next minute he was rushing to the aid of his friend the Colonel. He had seen him tripped and thrown to the ground by the crowd molesting him. Other specials rushed up too and were striving to effect some arrests, when the Colonel, scrambling from under the legs of everybody like a Rugby forward from under the scrum, called, "No; let them be. I can't tell which it was; and, anyhow, they were probably shoved from behind. Let them be; I shan't charge anyone." Having said which, he dusted his suit and rearranged his brassard with fingers that trembled a little, for he was not a young man. Tony observed that the Colonel, like himself, had not even drawn his truncheon.

This was the last thing that Tony observed with any intelligence for some time, because, in the midst of its apprehension, a sharp-edged stone hit him on the side of the head, drew blood, and stunned him. He felt someone catch him under the armpits as he swayed; and then he knew that two people were supporting him towards the depot. The road must have been cleared by now, for his feet went over sunlit cobbles to the depot's gates, which opened to admit him. Somebody led him out of the sunlight and under a roof where all seemed

dark. Somebody bade him sit down and rest. The same person (he thought) cleaned the wound with a handkerchief and said, "It's a little more'n a scratch, sir. It'll be looked at properly when we get back to the Tahn 'Awl."

Then the world before his eyes, shaping itself in the haze, assumed outline and solidity and brightness, and he saw that he was in one of the sheds which housed the trams. He was sitting on a long platform like a station's; and there, on their rails, one behind another, like a train at standstill in the station, were the trams. There they were: the *casus belli*, the apples of discord. The trams, God bless them! One behind another, they waited; and all their windows were protected by rabbit-run netting; and their drivers' footboards and conductors' footboards were caged with the same. So that's what the hammering had been!

"Pig-headed old fool." He was thinking of Alderman Scrase, and all that it had cost to gratify one old gentleman's obstinacy.

Feeling quite recovered now, he jumped up and told the young constable who had been his nurse that he was going back to the battle. As the gates opened to let him out, he saw the last charge of the mounted men—if such a slow, sweeping-up movement could be called a charge. They were clearing the road of its last stragglers. Two cordons of police, a hundred yards apart, stretched from pavement to pavement; and the red wall of the depot stared at an empty space before it. Those police who were not wanted for the cordons were standing about, waiting to be "fallen in."

And the volunteers, presumably, were within the depot.

The Chief Constable, as neat as when he set out, spoke to the superintendents; and they formed up the parade in column of fours again.

"Left turn!"

With the dapper little Chief at its head, the column marched back to the Town Hall. Quietly, victoriously, it marched home, bringing its ambulance van. This time, however, the van was not at the tail of the marching body, but in its heart, and guarded on all sides like the coach of a king. Seventeen prisoners rode within.

"A fine funeral march for the men inside," muttered Tony to the Colonel.

The Colonel shook a sorrowful head. "Yes, poor blighters!

and I'm quite sure that we've only nabbed the stupidest and the oldest, and those who couldn't scuttle away fast enough. And it's six months for most of 'em, if Scrase is in court. As he will be—he never neglects his duty.”

In front of the Town Hall the police were halted and held in their ranks till the prisoners had been removed from the van to the cells. With much sympathy, Tony watched them brought out: seventeen of them and all handcuffed. The last but one was Joe Wylie. As they led him in, he raised his two handcuffed fists to brush with his knuckles both wings of his moustache. He looked a little dazed.

CHAPTER V

OUTSIDE THE CELLS

ONE iron trellis after another was rolled back on its wheels to allow Tony to go through to the cells. And a harried face he took through with him. The cells were in the basement of the Town Hall; and this morning, in less than an hour's time, the prisoners taken in yesterday's battle would come up for judgment in the court above, Alderman Scrase, Mayor of Thamesmouth, presiding. Last night Tony had turned in his sleep, thought, and become broad awake. In the name of mischief. . . . To-morrow Joe Wylie would stand in the dock facing Alderman Scrase on the bench. Joe, who knew all about Kit Scrase; and the Alderman, Kit's father, who knew nothing.

And Alderman Scrase, strong in duty, would certainly administer one of his "exemplary sentences." And Joe: what would Joe do? Crude old sinner that he was, he had kept faith with Kit during nine years; though it must have been heavy going for him, who so dearly loved a story. Would he hold the story any longer if Alderman Scrase had his way with him? He had never been morally taut, and these years of idleness and loafing had relaxed him more; would his loyalty to Kit stand the strain of the Alderman's whip? Tony did not think it. Oh damn, what could he do? He could not go to the father, tell him the story, and beseech him for lenience. No . . . oh no, Kit, no. . . . Could he see Joe and stiffen him for the heroic walk? Joe had one virtue left—perhaps the only virtue he had ever possessed—his immense good-nature. And with it, there was his immense sentiment for the memories of war. One must stake all on these. But stay! There was Tib Wylie too. In his one lapse Joe had told her the story. Would she keep quiet when she saw her husband being dragged off to Coleborough Jail. It was very

difficult to believe. Tony tossed in his bed, impatient for the daylight, that he might be out attempting something; he felt much as he had felt that morning when he went out of the farm at Proven behind Poperinghe, with teeth set and every faculty strained towards the saving of his friend. "O Kit, we will not let you down."

And now he stood in a long stone hall, outside the cells. Behind him one of the folding iron trellises had been drawn into place, shutting him in. Opposite him a dark flight of stone stairs led upward to the court rooms above. On his left, between him and the doors of ten cells, another iron trellis stretched its full length, so that the doors behind this grating looked like the orifices through which caged beasts at a zoo retire from the public stare. One cell was empty and its door open; and by the light of its barred window, high in the back wall, he saw a low bed with folded blankets, and the cistern, chain and seat of a water-closet.

This side of the iron screen a police sergeant sat on a solitary chair; a big, handsome, florid fellow, who had undergone that remarkable change which happens to policemen when their helmets come off—his face seemed surprisingly human and his head seemed surprisingly small.

"I have permission to see one of your charges, Sergeant," said Tony.

"Which of 'em, sir?" asked the sergeant, recognizing him, and rising.

"Joe Wylie."

"Oh, that old rogue. Yes, sir." The sergeant moved to roll back the grating.

"Wait a minute, Sergeant. What'll he get?"

"Six months."

"Gosh, no! Six days."

"Six months for a certainty," repeated the sergeant, jingling his keys. "They give that two days ago to those other lads—them that threw stones at the buses."

"Savage!"

"A bit smart, perhaps; but we 'ave to hit out at a time like this."

"O Christ!" Tony's irritation burst up, but he wrapped it in a laugh for the sergeant's sake, who was a pleasant fellow. "Damn and blast! Surely our job is to keep order; not to get jumpy and hit out."

"I don't think we're doing that, sir."

"Not you regulars perhaps; but you should hear some of the specials! And what about the Mayor and his bench of amateur magistrates upstairs?"

"Oh, *them*. Yes, that's right: they're seeing red."

"Yes, when they ought to be umpires seeing fair play. Instead of that, every man of them is picturing himself as staff officer in a strike-breaking army, and a damned energetic one too."

"That's right, sir. The stipendiaries are really better at a time like this. Yes"—he winked, and unconsciously provided Tony with an epigram—"it's these 'ere Justices of the Peace that go out on the war-path."

"What is Joe charged with?"

"Inciting to riot."

"Good lord!" In a nameless exasperation Tony began to walk up and down. "Good God! Just because he called a lout of a policeman a few lewd names and mentioned the Russians."

"It's more than that, sir——"

"We *all* talk sedition when we mean something else. And now we're going to give him six months for being more English than most of us."

"It's more than that, sir. He sloshed a policeman on the jaw."

Tony laughed. "Of course he did! To tell the truth, *I've* wanted all my life—just for once—to bonnet a policeman. *And* to throw a stone through a bus window. This strike was Joe's chance of a lifetime to get rid of a little fun like that."

"Well, now he's got to pay for his fun, sir."

"So he would—a reasonable fine. But six months! Well, let's see the old scamp."

The sergeant rolled back the screen and went to the door of the fourth cell and opened it. "Here, Joe! You can come out and stretch your legs a bit."

Joe emerged, blinking his eyes at the brighter light of the passage. In those eyes he was trying to keep his Cockney impudence alight, but worry and pain had dimmed that pleasant lamp. Evidently he had been lying on his bed, for he shook into place his odd, untidy assortment of clothes, while he artfully unbuttoned his jacket and pulled down his waistcoat,

so as to unveil before the eyes of authority the array of medals at his breast.

"Thank you, boss," he said to the sergeant. "I down't mind if I do. Sitting in there's a bit like spending the day in the——" he winked his meaning.

"Here's a gentleman says he knows you."

Joe looked and saw Tony. "Gawd strike me; it's you, sir. Oh, of course: I'd forgotten you was a special. I bin a bit dazed ever since I was took. Fency *you* a copper, sir. Like *'im*." He pointed to the sergeant and then laid the finger along his moustache to cover a jest, while his eyes twinkled artfully above it. "Gaw! 'Ow did yer come dahn as low as that?"

The sergeant accepted the pleasantry with good humour, saying only: "*Ere!* You be careful! Your jokes ain't too timely."

"*Wur!*" Suddenly Joe sloughed all humour and flared into vindictiveness. "It's a ruddy fine joke you're 'avin' with me, ain't it? What the hell 'ave I done more'n anyone else, to be shut up in 'ere? Lawst me temper a bit, p'raps, but what abaht *you*? Have *you* never lawst yer wool when someone's riled yer? Arst yer wife, if yer've got one! But 'ush! Not a word abaht you! You got a blue uniform on, provided by me and others aht o' the taxes, and I got a dirty ole coat. 'Ush! not a word abaht you. Not a word!"

"That's about right, Joe," laughed the sergeant. "Well, sir, I'll——"

"Oh, larf! larf if it seems funny to yer! Not that it improves yer face, mind; but you can't 'elp your dial, I suppose: it was all your mother could do for yer."

"That's right, Joe. Well, sir, I'll leave you to it. Probably you'll want to talk to him spiritual."

Joe watched the sergeant move away. "Come in here, sir," he said knowingly, and cocking his thumb over his shoulder towards the cell. "You come in here, sir, if you down't mind. 'Tain't a ballroom, not as you'd call it, but it's all I've got, jest for the time bein'. It's rather like a double-u, I'm afraid, but you and I've bin in worse dug-outs in our time, 'aven't we? I'd like to talk to you a bit, not as a man to a stinkin' copper, but as a man to a *man*."

They went into the dim cell, and Tony sat on the bed. Joe sat elsewhere.

"I ain't done nothin', sir, I swear it—nothin' more'n anyone else. When I found 'em marchin' me to the station, I could 'a' cried, I could."

"What exactly happened?"

"*Wurl*, sir, I 'eard that there was a 'ell of a mob rahnd the tram depot, and I run there as fast as I could, hopin' to see some scrappin'—same as *you* would, sir——"

"Certainly, Joe."

"Yes. O' *course*! I wasn't for doin' anything meself; honest I wasn't. Well, when I got to the edge of the crowd, I 'eard what it was: it was about five thousand coppers escortin' about five volunteers into the depot."

"I know," Tony explained. "I was one of the coppers myself."

"Was you, sir? Well, then, you saw the mounted specials clear the Rec. I was watchin' that—law, it was comic, it was!—I was watching it when we heard it all over the shop that the specials were takin' their sticks to the women, who had shouted out some real nasty bits at them——"

"They didn't, Joe. They never used their sticks."

"Well, they brandished 'em, any old how; I sor 'em. And the boys was ready to believe that they'd used 'em; and all those arahnd me, as you can imagine, began to talk blue murder and to swear that, if they could get near the cops, they'd learn 'em to hit women; and what with all this excitement, I got a bit above myself and shouted 'Up the Russians!' I mean: what's the 'arm in that, sir? I don't hold with all the Russians do, myself; it was 'alf in fun, really; and I'd said it before I knew what I'd done. And then I shied a stone or two—yuss, I'm ready to admit I did—jest in the excitement of the moment, and because everyone else was; and, would you believe me, sir, I'd no sooner done it than a dirty sneak in a bowler 'at comes up and says, 'Wodger say, mate?'—jest like that, as though he was a pal—so I says to 'im, 'Come on, chum; we can knock spots off these b——s. Up the Russians, me lad!' and he just seizes the sleeve of me coat and says, 'I arrest yer. I'm a police awficer'—how was I to know he was a police officer, with his bowler 'at?—and he whistles up one of them dirty, lousy specials——"

Tony bowed. "Thank you, Joe."

"Oh, not meaning the like of you, sir—and between the two of 'em they shoved me along, as though I was a common

lag! *Course* I resisted! Same as you would, sir, being a free man in a free country. I shahts, 'Disabled Ex-Service Man'! But the bowler-'at feller only laughed at that—the lousy sneak! I wonder what *he* done in the Great War. Spent most of his time in a Gents' Convenience, dodgin' the air-raids, I'll be bound!—and he hands me over to a copper in uniform who 'ustled me along real rough—till I proper lawst me temper and landed 'im one on the jaw. Then they got nasty, and frog-marched me to that there van. I never bin frog-marched before: it's humiliatin', sir. . . . And I can't see what I done—quite. . . . It's bullyin' like this that turns us into bolshies. . . . You see, I never bin in trouble before. I've had my bit of C.B. in the army, nah and again, as you know, sir; but I never bin jugged like this. It—it brands a feller, sir."

Joe pausing, Tony took the opportunity to ask:

"Joe, do you realize who'll be presiding over the magistrates when your case comes on?"

"No, sir. Who?"

"Mr. Scrase."

"Mr. Scrase! Law! o' course he will! I'd forgotten that. But that's good, sir"—Joe had suddenly brightened up—"he'll do all he can to get me aht of this, I know."

"I'm afraid he won't, Joe."

"Yes, sir; yes, he will. When I went to see 'im after Captain Scrase—after what 'appened—Mrs. Wylie and I went together—he was that nice and grateful for the—the lies I told 'im, and he said—why, I can remember his exact words!—he says, 'I take it very kindly your comin' along like this, Wylie; and if ever I can do anything for yer, jest you lemme know.'"

"Yes, but"—Tony shook his head—"he's—he's thinking it his duty to be very severe just now."

"Ow, *is* he?" Joe's accent had changed; there was menace in it.

Tony felt his heart tumble. "Joe," he began, "I'm sure if Mr. Scrase studied his personal feelings, he'd like to help you. But he feels that he represents the State——"

"Ow, *does* he? Well, I don't 'appen to 'ave much use for the State at present. If the State brands me, maybe I can hit back. Yuss, Mr. Scrase doesn't know what he's handlin'. . . . Gaw! comic, isn't it, when you come to think of it? I could put him in his place all right."

"But what good would it do? It wouldn't prevent him discharging what he considers to be his duty, and it would only injure very terribly a poor old gentleman and his wife——"

"Ain't he injurin' me? Six months! Six months they say we'll get. Six months for slammin' at a copper! . . . And it ain't as if it was a good slam, neither. I wish to Christ it was!"

Sitting on the bed, with elbows on knees and fingers idly playing with a handkerchief, Tony opened all his arguments: what would be gained by it? Joe had persevered for more than nine years, in a good and generous action, the memory of which would be a happiness always; why undo it all now?

But the walls of a jail were darkening around his listener, stunning thought in him and dulling mercy. "'What'd be gained,' sir? I could let him know that I once showed mercy to him, when he can't show none to me, blast him!" Ah, but then, leave him out of it. Not mercy for him, but for Captain Scrase, who was given little enough. . . . "Yes, sir, that's all that matters to me. But I dunno! I don't trust myself any longer. Six months is six months. It's human nature to want to get a little of your own back."

"I know," said Tony, "but——"

"Your missus to see you, Joe." The sergeant broke in upon their talk. "Excuse me, sir. He'd better come now. He's only got a few minutes."

Joe jumped up and went out; and Tony followed. There stood Tib Wylie, and directly Tony saw her he knew that she had come prepared to plunge into a sea of woe; to be content with nothing but the deepest waves; to swim and sink and flounder there as wildly as might be; and to get a luxurious, if unperceived, enjoyment in flaunting her hysteria. She was even dressed as smartly and richly as possible for this rich occasion; her bosom heaved under a wealth of lace and trinkets; her red eyes dripped into the best handkerchief from her drawer; her hands made gestures through the air in the best of her Sunday gloves.

"Ow, there he is!" she cried, and rushed towards Joe, as he appeared. "There he is!" He might have been a lost child, found again after weeks of despair. "Ow, Joe, you didn't do nothin', I know—nothin' to speak of. It's a shyme—you that's never been a police case in your life. Wodger do it for, Joe? I always told yer you would. And now what'll

they do to yer? I never want another night like last night—not to my dyin' day. When I got home late from my work, Mrs. Whitfield rushed in from next door and said: 'They've took 'im! They've took Mr. Wylie!' And I just come over sick, and set down to recover meself. And I said——"

"All right, ma," soothed Joe, patting her shoulder. "Don't paw me about."

"—and I said, 'It's a lie,' I said, 'they've got the wrong man. Joe don't believe in getting on the wrong side of the police,' I said. And Mrs. Whitfield said, 'I'm afraid he's *for* it, now, Mrs. Wylie'; and I said, 'No no! They'll let him awf with a caution. He's a Disabled Ex-Service Man. They can't be goin' to put him into quod. They *can't*.' But she said, 'I'd like to think so for your sake, Mrs. Wylie, but they say he's in for six months. You must bear up,' she said; 'you must bear up, you poor dear, and we'll all 'elp you,' and she was very good and comfortin'. Oh, she's a saint, that woman, she is."

"That's right, ma," said Joe, who didn't know what he was saying. "She's all right."

"And all last night I tawst and tawst. It's a mercy I didn't lose my reason. I thought it was goin', straight I did! And Mrs. Whitfield come in first thing this mornin'——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Joe, and looked her up and down. "I say, Tib. You do look a treat. You're all poshed up."

Tib wiped her eyes: obviously she was pleased by his praise. "Yes, I'm comin' to your trial," she said, "and I determined to do you credit"—which sentence immediately overcame her again, and she flooded into her handkerchief.

Joe called up jocosity, for everybody's sake. "Gaw, she looks all right, don't she, sir?" he asked of Tony. "Togged up regardless. Does *your* missus come to your trials like that?"

Tib lifted her blond head from the handkerchief, and explained it all in a voice that flowed soft and rich as cream, because pride was blending with her sorrows.

"Yes; at first I started awf straight away this mornin', without me 'at, and all adrift, as you might say. Then, suddenly, I determined not to let you dahn, so I run back—that 'ot and dithery as I was—and I dressed myself proper. And Mrs. Whitfield come in and 'elped me, and she brought me a little something that Mr. Whitfield had by him"—which memory broached another gush of feeling—"oh, she's a synte,

that woman! I shall never forget all she done for me in this time of trouble. Never, I shan't! And I said to her, as she ministered to me, I said: 'I may have to go into the box and give him a good character. *Which* I will,' I says; 'and I'll let 'em see, in me own person, that he comes from respectable folk. And if they're going to put him into quod for what he never meant to do, why, then, I'll go dressed as I would to his funeral and shyme 'em!'"—a description of her misery and her goodness which broke her down completely.

Joe decided that another jest would suitably fill up the wait, so he said, "There won't be no separation allowance this time, Tib," and turned to Tony. "Thet's so, ain't it, sir? No separation allowance this time, though I *shall* be joinin' His Majesty's Forces again, in a manner of speakin'."

"Nah, don't you worry yourself about that, Joe," said Tib, opening up her handkerchief to find a dry place. "I shall 'ave your disablement pension. I jest thought to pop in and inquire if they'd stop that; and they says no. . . . But oh! the shyme of it! A pensioned ex-Service man, *which* he is, sir, and there's no gettin' away from that. It's crool! Crool!"

Joe broke from her. He, too, was moved: moved by the cruelty of it, when he remembered his smashed shoulder, his shell-shock and his gas. "Now don't you unman me with your blubberin', Tib. If I've got to take it, I want to take it." And he swept both sides of his moustache.

But Tib was too far gone to listen to him. She had plunged into the uttermost depths and cared not what she cried from that hollow so long as it sounded worthy of her hysteria and her goodness. "And I'll wait for you, Jow," she loudly sobbed. "I'll be faithful to yer—I thought I'd like to tell you that. They may keep you years and years, but I'll be faithful to yer. I can't say more, can I? You've bin a good 'usband to me, in your *way*—I've always said so; and I'm not goin' back on it now. Not for anyone! They may keep you years and years for all I care. They may 'ang yer, and I'll still be faithful to yer! They may do whatever they likes, but I'll wait for yer, carryin' me 'ead 'igh, in the face of them all. You'll think of that in your cell, won't yer? I'll tell everyone that you're in trouble, and that I ain't ashamed, because it was crool, crool . . . crool. . . ."

Perhaps it was well for all that the sergeant returned at this moment and called, "Look out, Joe. Smarten up! Here's

the Mayor and Mayoress themselves to see you. Seems you're known to them."

("Damn!" thought Tony.)

"Law!" laughed Joe. "I'm popular with all classes, I am. Pull yourself together, Tib. We know this old codger. It's Mr. Scrase, Captain Scrase's father."

"Ow, lord!" Tib came up from the depths of her hysteria to the surface, and stared around at a world of some interest. "O' course it's 'im! He'll do something for you, Joe."

"Will he? I *don't* think."

"Yes, he will. Oh, I'm glad it's 'im! He said he would, don't you remember? He's come to tell yer."

"Has he? Thump!"

The Mayor and Mayoress entered. Each was scrupulously dressed as usual; each a study in black and white; the Mayor, a tall, narrow old gentleman with a humourless face; the Mayoress one of those soft, gentle, refined old ladies who give no quarter to strikers.

"Good morning, O'Grogan," said Alderman Scrase, observing Tony.

"Good morning, Mr. O'Grogan," said Mrs. Scrase, and glanced at his armlet. "I am glad to see you are on the right side."

"I am on no side, Mrs. Scrase," said Tony.

Mrs. Wylie ran impulsively to the Mayor. "Ow, he ain't done nothin', your worship. Or he ain't meant to. He can't be one of the strikers, because he ain't even in work. Let 'im awf this time, sir, and I'll answer he don't trouble you any more."

The Mayor motioned her, not unkindly, to one side. "All right, my good woman, don't excite yourself. He shall have justice; be sure of that."

"Nah, not justice; not justice. None of his family or mine has ever bin in trouble, sir."

"Jane." The Mayor turned to his wife. "You'd better talk to her. She seems a little overwrought."

"Yes, mum." Mrs. Wylie swam towards the Mayoress. "Oh, mum—your ladyship, you'll plead with 'im, won't you? Mr. Wylie never meant to come the wrong side of the police. He's a decent-livin' man really. He's my 'usband, and I ought to know. He has a proper respect for the law, and never meant to come up against it. I know all abaht him; and

he's as good a 'usband as yours is, mum"—and she added in one of her sudden rich explanations—"in his different *way*."

"We wish to do everything we can, Mrs. Wylie," said the Mayoress. "We remember how your husband came to see us nine years ago, after my son's death. And you, I think."

"Yes, mum, I was there; and you'll use your influence for 'im nah, won't you, after all he done for your pore boy?"

"I have no influence," sighed Mrs. Scrase.

"But after what he done——"

"Shurrup, Tib!" murmured Joe.

"Very sorry to see you here, my man," said Alderman Scrase to Joe.

"Yes, Mr. Mayor, sir." Joe had come smartly to attention as a disabled ex-Service man should.

"Believe me, Wylie, when I realized who you were, and that I should be the presiding magistrate when they heard your case, I was distressed—very distressed. I hope that, whatever happens, you will remember that."

"Yuss, Mr. Mayor, sir."

"I felt compelled to come and see you before the case came on. I—er—I so want you to realize that often a magistrate has to pass sentences that go right against his feelings. He must, at all costs, be quite impersonal and—er—and impartial."

"Oh . . . yes, sir!"

"You'll have expert legal assistance, Wylie. All those arrested in this unfortunate strike have had that."

"It don't seem to have done 'em much good, sir, if I may say so," offered Joe.

"It did them all the good that it was possible to do for them. Our British courts are the fairest in the world. And I just want to say that, if the worst comes to the worst, I shall make it my personal business to find you employment when you come out."

And Mrs. Scrase touched him gently on the arm. "And while you are away, I'll look after your wife and keep an eye on your home."

"But I ain't condemned yet, mum," objected Joe.

"No, no, no." The Mayoress was rather flustered by this. "Of course not. But . . . but rioting just now, as the Mayor has said, has to be dealt with severely. Oh, believe me, I don't think you're as much to blame as your leaders."

I only think that you've been misguided. That's why I'm prepared to care for your dependants."

Joe's under-lip protruded. "Maybe we ain't acceptin' any benefits, mum."

"No, no, no," pleaded the Mayoress. "You mustn't get stubborn. We want to be of help to you."

"I don't know that I want yer 'elp, mum. I'm all at sea abaht it—all in a fog. I served me country in the Great War, and now if me country's goin' to send me to clink jest for gettin' a shade above meself, well, I done with all your 'elps, see?"

"Yuss, and I should think so!" endorsed Mrs. Wylie, who had become very straight and dignified.

"I admit that, in a moment of forgettin' meself, I *did* 'it a policeman, but if they can't set against a little thing like that the fact that I enlisted on the Fourth of August, Nineteen-Fourteen, and that I got wounded and gassed, fightin' for my country——"

"That's all irrelevant, Wylie," interrupted Mr. Scrase. "As I've said in court many times lately, some of you men are working the ex-Service sentiment to death. It can't be used as an excuse for evading punishment. It now leaves us magistrates cold."

"Oh . . . I see, sir."

Mrs. Wylie took a step forward. "Tell 'em what you know, Joe, and bring 'em to their senses."

The Mayor was startled. Looking around for help, he announced: "This woman mustn't be allowed to talk like that."

"Nah, shut up, Tib," commanded her husband. But Tib's head with its golden hair began to toss and shake, as if it would not long be able to hold the anger and defiance fermenting in it.

"You see," explained Mrs. Scrase, touching Joe on the sleeve, and trying to be helpful, "in those days you were fighting for us and we were indeed grateful, but now when you've declared war on us——"

"On who, mum?"

"On the community."

"Aren't you mixin' up the community with your side, mum?"

"My wife is quite right," said the Mayor, who had been grateful for this help in time of trouble. "The strike is a

war against the community, and you cannot at the same time declare war and expect mercy."

"I never 'eard such——" announced Tib. "Don't you listen to them, Joe. *They've* got nothin' for you."

The Mayor was really angry. "*Will* you be quiet, my good woman. You *cannot* be allowed to speak in this way."

"Oh, can't I?" Tib stepped nearer to him, while her head tossed and shook. "Then I shall, then! *And* I don't care what you do to me, so don't think it. Let me tell you that Mr. Wylie and I know a thing or two, *which*, if we cared to use it, would make you think twice before you come the High and Mighty over *us*. You don't deserve all the kindness that's bin shown to you, and that's the truth, if I never speak it again in my life. Anyone can see that you're goin' to give 'im one of your savage sentences, whether there's anything in his favour or not. It's cowardly, all settin' on to one man because he shown some sympathy with his mates. You and your wealth—you don't need to strike for an extra shillin' or two a week, and you can't understand them that do. You and your manservants—'aven't I been in your house? And may I be struck dead if ever I set foot in it again!—you can get others to do your work, and spend yer time coming dahn here sentencing poor fellers to jail——"

"You are not doing your husband any good by this behaviour, Mrs. Wylie," rebuked the Alderman.

"What do I care if I am or not? What does it matter if I am or not? Anyone with 'alf an eye can see that you've made up your mind to sentence him, before ever 'is case is heard. You and your justice! You think I'd give a tanner for his chance of gettin' decent treatment with you for the beak? Not likely! And I pity all the other poor fellers that are in with 'im: with all my soul I do. And if when they come out they don't alter the Law of the Land so as to 'ave it over you, then they're bigger fools than I take 'em for; and that's all I'll say. I never was one for 'oldin' with this strike, but I hope to Christ, now, that it'll be a bloody revolution and learn some of the likes of you whether you're God Almighty, or whether you're nothin' so very much to write home about, after all. See? Yuss!"

At a signal from the Mayor, Tony led her away gently, while she shouted backward: "Oh, yuss, you can order 'im to shift me. You can do what you bloody well like with

me. You can 'ave me up in your —— court, and sentence me to jail, f'r all I care. You can come and fetch me yerself, if you like." This was shrieked, for now she was almost out of hearing. "Here! I'll give you my address. It's 'Mrs. Wylie, Thirty-seven, Appleton Street, Thamesmouth, Essex.'

"And I don't care who knows it. No." She gave this last sentence to Tony, as, breathless, her bosom heaving, she touched the hat and the hair on her trembling head.

"Terrible; terrible," sighed Mrs. Scrase.

The silence was broken by the filing of several policemen into the hall. The Mayor, bracing back his shoulders and adjusting his eyebrows after Mrs. Wylie's assault, looked at his watch.

"There are only a few minutes before the court sits. Sergeant, you had better take this man now. . . . His wife can wait here, no doubt."

Tib rushed to her husband. "No, Joe, I don't want to see them put yer into yer cell. It might upset me. I'll go up to the police court now." After patting her eyes and nose with her handkerchief, she straightened her hat, arranged her clothes, and said with some pride: "They'll give me a special seat, won't they, in the public gallery, and somewhere right in front? Yes, of course they will. I'll go and take my place now. You'll see me, Joe; and I'll keep smilin' back at yer. It may sort-a strengthen yer, see?"

And, smiling already, she walked away to her sorrowful but magnificent privilege.

"I must go to the court now, Wylie," said the Mayor. "I beg you will remember all I've said. I meant it most sincerely. And I am quite ready to forget all your wife's—er—abuse. She is naturally overwrought. It is all so distressing—so distressing."

"Terrible," sighed Mrs. Scrase, who was not so disposed to forgive.

"Thenk you, sir."

"Come on, then," the sergeant commanded Joe; and Joe, clicking his heels by way of a salute to the Mayor, marched in front of the sergeant to his cell. The sergeant locked the door on him.

"Poor misguided man," sighed the Mayoress, as she and her husband turned to go.

Tony, without much hope, attempted an appeal. "Deal leniently with him, sir."

The Mayor paused; he had no great love for St. Wilfrid's curate. "I shall deal justly with him, O'Grogan. When the country is faced with revolution, lenience is itself a crime."

"Of course, of course," his wife echoed him. "Poor man, I'm afraid he'll have to take his sentence."

"He was extraordinarily kind to Kit in his last days, sir. I was there, and saw how good he was."

Alderman Scrase raised one hand a little way, and let it fall, frustrated. "I cannot—I must not let any personal consideration like that stand between me and the administration of justice. Come, my dear."

Mrs. Scrase, before going, stated her view. "I can't see that Kit has anything to do with it, Mr. O'Grogan. It is not our duty to be gentle with men who are destroying the country that others died for."

"Come, my dear," repeated the Alderman. "I am already late."

And they went out together to fulfil their task, however painful it might be, of saving England. And Tony watched them go, thinking: "Like Joe Wylie, I am all in a fog. There go a most scrupulous old gentleman and a most loyal old lady. And yet . . . what is loyalty to England if it is not, in great part, loyalty to Joe Wylie and his class?"

His thoughts were jarred by the loud ringing of an electric bell. A voice called, "Bring 'em along," and the policemen opened the cell doors and brought out some of the prisoners, forming them into a line. Joe was the last of the line. "Gawd, I must spruce meself up a bit," he said laughing. After he had dusted down his clothes, he looked along the line of his fellow prisoners. "Crikey!" he exclaimed. "Fall in, the Coldstream Guards! Tallest on the right, shortest on the left!"

"Silence there!" roared the sergeant.

The electric bell rang again.

Joe winked at Tony. "It's 'Over the top and the best of luck' now, sir," he whispered.

Tony went upstairs to the court.

The trial of the seventeen lasted five hours. Late in the afternoon the bench of sixteen magistrates, led by Alderman

Scrase, retired to consider their decisions. They returned after half an hour's absence, and Alderman Scrase addressed the court. He spoke quietly, but the court had sunk to such a stillness that every word was audible. So carefully dressed, so handsome, so grave, he looked worthy to be the head and voice of Thamesmouth; and Tony was surprised to find himself admiring him; surprised to catch, instantaneously and for the first time, the knowledge that, if Kit had not inherited his father's simplicity, he had drawn his rectitude from him.

"I desire to say that the Bench has regarded the cases before us to-day as matters of the utmost seriousness. We have not come—er—lightly—to our decisions. This is a very critical time through which our country is passing, and we consider that we should be failing in our duty if we did not make sharp examples of men who, unwittingly perhaps, are endangering it more than they know. Here are citizens of Thamesmouth who are ready to forget, on the slightest provocation, the protection, the security, the—er—liberty to go about their lawful occasions—which is ensured for them by the discipline and order of their town, and by the services and the amenities which it supplies. They attack its police, who are their guardians and protectors—their own servants, watching over their lives and liberties, year in, year out, with a steadiness, an uprightness—and yes, a forbearance—that I take this opportunity of recording with the admiration and gratitude of us all. They threaten our town with mob law, little realizing that nothing will destroy a town so quickly—and all that we hold dear, and all that the centuries have built for us—as that the mob, which is undisciplined itself and without any sanctions by which it can achieve discipline in others, should take the power into its own hands. We will have no mob law in Thamesmouth. We earnestly hope that the sentences now to be passed will act as deterrents to any other thoughtless and irresponsible persons who may be contemplating insurrectionary behaviour. The sentences are as follows:

"Albert Isaac Western, two months' hard labour on each of the three charges, the sentences to run consecutively, making six months in all.

"Charles Arthur Glascock, two months' hard labour on two charges, to run concurrently, making two months in all.

"Joseph William Wylie, two months' hard labour, on two charges, to run consecutively, making four months in all——"

At this a woman rose, sobbing, in the body of the court. "No! No! He ain't done nothin'," she cried. A policeman removed her gently, and at the door she turned and cried again, "Cowards! Cowards!" Tony left his place to be with her and help her, while the Alderman's voice, unshaken, pursued its duty:

"Horace Victor Langden, two months' hard labour on each of the three charges, to run consecutively——"

In the echoing gallery above the staircase Tony found Mrs. Wylie sobbing into her handkerchief and heeding little of the comfort that a kindly policeman proffered. Other women were waiting there too.

"Will they take him away to-night?" she asked.

"I don't know," Tony answered. "I'll go and find out everything for you." He went down to the police station and sought out the sergeant.

"What happens to him now, Sergeant?"

"Coleborough Jail happens to him, sir."

"Yes, but when?"

"Almost at once, sir."

"What, this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir. At a time like this, we want these cells empty for the next comers."

"Will his wife be able to say good-bye to him? She's upstairs."

"Oh, yes, sir. . . . Bring her outside, where the others are waiting. We'll let you know when she can come in."

So Tony brought her down to a lobby where they stood together on the happier side of the first of the iron grilles. Other weeping women, with silent men companions, waited there too. Tony and Tib Wylie were nearest the grille; and in about an hour's time a policeman drew it and said pleasantly, "Come on, ma. You'll have forgotten all about this in a year's time."

"Oh, thank you," answered Mrs. Wylie, and passed through. She was too spent to do anything but sob now. "Thank you very much."

"Here's your missus, Joe," called the policeman when they were once again outside the cells.

Joe was waiting there. "Well, Tib," he said, attempting cheerfulness. "I properly torn it for yer this time."

"It's not you," sobbed Tib. "You ain't done nothin."

At least, nothin' to speak of. It's them. Wicked; that's what it is; jest wicked."

"Well, well, well. Four months ain't too long. I don't mind that so much. But they'll have it up against me that I've been in quod."

"I know. I know."

"Make it a bit hard for you in the street, won't it, Tib?"

"Oh, I shan't let anyone come it over me!" answered Mrs. Wylie, throwing up her head. "I was thinkin' it all over in the court. What I says is: if my man's done summat they can justly put him away for, why, then I keeps myself to myself; but when he's done nothin' rightly to be ashamed of—or nothin' but what a fine would pay for—why, then I walks the streets with me 'ead as 'igh as ever."

"And there's another thing," Tony put in. "This sentence is hardly an ordinary sentence, Joe. You must think of yourself as a sort of political offender, and sometimes that's no great disgrace. You're a political martyr, eh? You are quite proud of having been wounded in the war; why not be proud of going to jail for your new cause—what?"

"Yuss, dear," endorsed Mrs. Wylie. "You 'ark to what the minister says. Only larst night Mrs. Whitfield was tellin' me of a minister that went to jail for havin' incense and what-not in 'is church, and all 'is congregation were at the prison gates to welcome 'im when he come out! He thought nothin' of it. Nor did anyone else, either."

"Still . . ." grumbled Joe, "four months' 'ard is four months' 'ard, whether political or religious or anythin' else. That's what I say."

"Listen, Joe," said Tony. "You've given up all thought of 'getting your own back' on Mr. Scrase, haven't you?"

"That I 'aven't!" assured Joe.

"I should think not indeed!" agreed Tib.

"Ah, Joe, but you must," pleaded Tony. "Listen to me a minute. I want you to think hard of Captain Scrase——"

"Christ! I been doin' it, sir, I don't mind tellin' yer. I been tryin' to do it 'ard ever since I got me sentence . . . because I don't want to let 'im dahn."

"Oh, splendid, Joe!"

"But it ain't easy, sir."

"I know it's not. And that's why I want you to give me

a promise now—a solemn pledge if you like—that you'll never, never, *never* say anything about it. You'd gain nothing——”

“I'd get some of me own back. Isn't that gainin' something?”

“Yuss!” nodded Mrs. Wylie.

“Well, then, it's gaining too much. You've taken a hard knock, I know—but you'd hit two old people a hundred times harder—oh, God, yes! You'd lay a shadow on the rest of their lives.”

“Ain't *he* layin' a shadder on Joe's life?” demanded Mrs. Wylie.

“We've agreed that it needn't prove too great a shadow, Mrs. Wylie. Look here, old man; like you I've been thinking hard in that court.” Tony was about to play every gun on the old man's sentiment. “Do you remember that room in the farmhouse at Proven?”

“Yes, sir, I should reckon I do! A cushy spot, Proven, if it hadn't been for *that*.”

“And how you and I came back, after seeing the battalion march off, and found his body——”

“Lord, yes, sir!”

“—and how you guessed at once what had happened: that the Colonel had given him his opportunity to take his own life, because none of us were going to have him court-martialled and shot by other hands than his own; and do you remember how you said that it was ‘proper sporting’ of the Colonel?”

“Yes, sir; and so it was, I shall always say.”

“And we swore a kind of solemn oath that we'd never tell the real story; and then we laid him in his grave, and you said, I remember, that, as far as you were concerned, he could lie comfortable. Are you going to make him turn in that grave now?”

Joe was silent.

“And now—I only thought of this, sitting in the court—do you remember how you made the cross yourself, and how you wrote on it, ‘Killed in action’? Are you going to cross out that inscription?”

“Cross it out, sir?”

“Well, that's what it comes to, if you begin to tell people. Leave it there, Joe. You put it there yourself.”

“Well, sir”—after a sullen pause Joe snapped this out, as

if he had best speak before he changed his mind—"crikey! I *will*, sir. There, I've said it!"

"Oh, good, Joe!"

"And, Tib, don't you breathe a word, neither. I ought never to 'a' told yer—and that's the truth."

"Ow, Jow!" Mrs. Wylie was deeply aggrieved. "'Ow can you say that? What you tell me to keep secret is locked in me own bosom. 'Course it is!"

"Well, I hope so," said her husband rudely.

"I won't say nothin', but I tell you this: I shan't take from 'em anythin' that they offer me."

"Don't be a fool, Tib," laughed Joe, who had become quite merry with his sense of righteousness. "Take all the lady'll give yer; I should."

Then the wives and friends were ordered to leave.

"Well, good-bye, Tib," said Joe, giving her a last kiss, after which he brushed his moustache.

"Ow, Joe." Tib's misery burst out anew. "I can't bear to think of you marchin' rahnd and rahnd a prison yard. Oh, he can't do it, sir, not with his varicose veins; and his feet do *draw* so."

"They won't make him do anything that he can't do, Mrs. Wylie," Tony comforted.

"March?" exclaimed Joe. "Ain't I marched a few thousand miles in the army? Crums, I can do it on me 'ead! Well, good-bye, sir."

"Good-bye, Joe. What you've done this evening will make you happy all the time you're in prison."

"*That's* all right, sir. Don't you worry about that, sir. Let the ole gentleman be 'appy—though it ain't for *his* sake—blast his bloody eyes!"

"Good-bye, Joe," moaned Mrs. Wylie, laying her hands on his shoulders. "I'll be waitin' for yer at the prison gates. I'll be standin' there when you come aht."

"Good-bye, Tib. 'Op it now, because the bugle's gawn. 'Visitors ashore!' Good-bye, ole gurl, and 'keep the 'ome fires burnin'."

This jest he emphasized by a wink at Tony.

"I'll look after her, Joe," said Tony, and led the weeping Tib away.

CHAPTER VI

THE TALE OF JOHN THAMESMOUTH

THE strike broke after eight days. At noon of Wednesday, May 12th, everybody in the streets of Thamesmouth—and the world had come abroad because the day was bright and sunny—was telling every passer-by the news: the General Council had called off the strike. The General Council of the Trades Union Congress had saved its face by the acceptance of a “basis for negotiation between the miners and the mine-owners” submitted by a mediating statesman; and by all means let them have this little mask to wear; one knew that the faces behind the mask were the faces of defeated and anxious men. Tony felt very sorry for them.

There was a curious change in the face of the streets. All was liveliness under the sunlight. In tune with the universal relief the sunlight itself seemed to be dancing. Buses bowled along again, their rightful drivers at the wheel. The trams came out, grating along their lines. One behind another they came out, the General Manager (Mr. Edmund Doyle) driving the first; and high was the laughter when the people saw the wire-netting screens nailed over the windows, and the wire-netting cages protecting the drivers. The drivers looked a little bashful in their cages; and the Funny Men of the pavements were hardly restrained from trying the impact of a stone or two against that netting. As a “gesture” the procession of the trams was not a success; there being no strike left for a background.

This was the end of the civil war in England, May, 1926. Not a shot had been fired; and there were no casualties except a few wild lads and a few old loafers now kicking their heels in prison. Everyone felt extraordinarily pleased; and the Wireless Chorus broadcast a rendering of Blake’s “Jerusalem.”

As an indelicate curate in Thamesmouth phrased it: the world had been feeling industrially sick for a long time, and now it had vomited in England and felt much better. The other countries which had sat in "the spectators'" seats to watch the play retired and expressed their applause by lifting the English pound some points above par. Sterling rose to 4.87 in New York, its highest value since the war.

On the Sunday evening after the strike Tony preached in the pulpit of St. Wilfrid's a sermon that was like a "repeat performance" of the famous sermon preached during the railway strike. Only the night before he had braced his will to this duty, and deliberately charged the chambers of his musket, *The Thamesmouth Advertiser* providing the nitric acid for his gun-cotton. *The Thamesmouth Advertiser* had appeared that day with a full report of the trial of Joe Wylie and his companions and had assailed them as "cowardly ruffians" and rejoiced in their "exemplary sentences." So Tony filled his musket. The Vicar would say that its discharge just now was inexpedient, but bah! Mr. Broadley's Expediency, its name was Fear. Now, if ever, was the time to tell his people that they would be most patriotic (as they so desired to be), and would serve their England best, if they expressed her real heart, which was liberal and humane. Always this idea was a leaping and consuming flame in him; and he mounted the pulpit with a sermon of some force and beauty beating at his head in its eagerness to escape. A very quiet sermon, as always; not brutal, not a wielding of the lash, but a loving hint that imagination should break its gyves and triumph over vindictiveness.

As he reached the pulpit floor it seemed to him that it might be that Sunday during the railway strike all over again. The picture was the same. He stood in the pulpit; the hymn died, and the people sat down and stared up at him. He saw Alderman Scrase in his seat, for this was an exceptional Sunday. He saw Mr. Bray in the other churchwarden's pew, with hands linked over his stomach, for Evensong was Mr. Bray's favourite service. The lamps in nave and chancel clicked out, except one on each bracket and the very bright one hanging over his head. He stood in the heart of a cone of light. And he leaned an elbow on the lectern, swept the large congregation with his eyes, and began to speak.

The method of his sermon was the same. He dramatized

his meaning in the story of a single man. A man that never lived, perhaps ; and yet lived in every street in Thamesmouth, almost in every house. Let him call him John Thamesmouth.

The eyes of the congregation were fixed on him like children's eyes, thirsting for the tale.

He showed them John Thamesmouth marching with the 15th Royal West Essex, "Thamesmouth's Own," over the roasting sands of Sinai beneath an oven of a sky. The battle of Romani waited for them, and the exhausted, silent men staggered towards it ; and every now and then the voice of John called out a jest or an obscenity (a shiver passed over this congregation which so disliked reality, but Tony quietly proceeded)—called out a jest or an obscenity which enabled the tottering column to laugh again, and stumble on. He told them how the same men, a year later, marched to Ypres and Passchendaele, "where the battalion now lies," and how, at the halts, they muttered murder and mutiny, but the voice of John, with its reiterant "Did I ever tell you this one, boys?" brought them back to laughter and disabled the mutiny again and again. He gave them the last picture of all : a French village where the new battalion stood to meet the last drive of the enemy, and John, believing it to be the end, put his rifle to his shoulder and said, "Come on, boys ! You didn't expect to join the army and *live*, didjer?"

"The next second a machine-gun bullet smashed his shoulder and its brother broke my head. Eight days ago Thamesmouth sentenced that man to four months' hard labour. No doubt he deserved something, because he had shouted a little sedition on behalf of his mates, thrown a stone in their interests, and resisted capture by the police ; and yet I feel—I cannot explain my feeling ; I can only tell it to you—that we sentenced him for the very qualities that we made great use of ten years ago : his irrepressible spirits, his Cockney impudence, his muddle-headed loyalty to his side, his sentimentality, and that peculiar national irony which will always talk sedition rather than patriotism. And I certainly feel that if we rejoice in his sentence, if we call him, as our local journal has done, 'a cowardly ruffian,' then we leave it to him to be a truer portrait than we are of our great, ironic, and tolerant nation."

Except for Alderman Scrase, who chose to regard it as an insult to the mayoralty, and Mr. Bray, who said he was getting a bit sick of all this Socialism, and Mrs. Scrase who reflected her husband, this sermon did not greatly offend the congregation. It had been too well done. Outside the church walls, however, among those who had not heard it, the rumour of its argument created a fine uproar. Other clergy of the diocese, who had lacked Tony's courage to speak, accused him of tactlessness or bumptiousness, according as they were good timid men or bad timid men. The *Advertiser*, not disposed to be attacked, published a leader next week in which it castigated "this *enfant terrible* of the Church in Thamesmouth," ascribing "pert ambition" to him and "a love of notoriety." Readers, who knew nothing of the sermon's balance, humility and tenderness, wrote abusive letters to the *Advertiser* for several weeks afterwards; and the *Advertiser* gladly printed them. Some anonymous correspondents sent their abuse direct to the preacher. The Vicar said nothing because, to his surprise, quite a few of the congregation seemed to resent the unfairness of the attack on their curate, and to think either that "the sermon was not as bad as all that," or that "it was rather beautiful in its way." Honor most palpably took fright at the attack and wished he hadn't provoked it. And Tony, not having heard his few defenders, felt very lonely.

Indeed he was astonished at the depression which held him, and wearied him, during these weeks in which a column of the *Advertiser* was devoted to his dissection by would-be wits, and any letter on his plate might be a letter of vulgar insult. He ought to have been able to laugh, shrug his shoulders, and get on with his work; that is what he would have liked to be able to do; but he could not; he allowed a sadness to gather round him, in which he doubted his every desire, hated many of his motives, and was sick with the futility of the world. He knew, for instance, that, though there had been love and loyalty in that sermon, there had also been not a little intolerance, not a little self-conceit, not a little relish for the coming sensation, and, poorest of all, not a little malice against the *Advertiser* for having despised his poems. "I dunno!" he would say to himself. "I'm weary, weary, weary. I give it all up."

And then one morning he came down to breakfast to find

many strange letters on his plate. The uppermost, as he guessed from its local postmark and its loud, slack hand, was an essay in abuse. He read it through, and it hurt him abominably. He picked up the second, and gave no sign to Honor that its envelope had dispersed all his enemies by first changing them into ghosts and then cancelling their existence. Its postmark was Montreal's; its hand Mary Leith's.

"Dear Mr. O'Grogan (he read),

"I think Daddy and I are really going abroad. We are supposed to be sailing from Quebec on June 20th, but I will not believe it until we are well out on the St. Lawrence!! Oh, beloved gulf of St. Lawrence!"

"I simply cannot realize that I shall be in England so soon. In fact I'm sure I shan't be: something is certain to go wrong. So much happiness is not good for people. We are going to Scotland first, and then down, or do you say 'up' to London, for a few weeks, when we go on the Continent. I am terribly, awfully, hysterically excited about it all—though Daddy is quite calm. I thought I would let you know, because it would be so nice to see you again."

"Sincerely,

"Mary Leith, but I expect you have forgotten her. Oh, Mary, how can you lie so?"

"P.S.—Please pray that nothing goes wrong."

He laid the letter down, and Honor could not know that the chambers of his brain were alight and the chambers of his body astir with foretasted joy. He was possessed by that exultant peace, that sense of serenity and integration which comes from yielding to one's real nature. He was going to call up in a beautiful creature a fullness of adoration; and that was what he really desired. He was going to enjoy the exquisite aches and unrests of loving her; and that was what he desired too. The censor in his mind veiled from view, though the veil was thin, that in the end he would probably leave unsatisfied the adoration he had created, and Mary would go wounded from him.

CHAPTER VII

A VISITOR TO ENGLAND

BUT Mary did not come that year. Something "went wrong" and it was not till May of the following year that her ship put out from Quebec into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. And all those eleven months Tony lived quietly and pleasantly with his resolve to take her when she came. The acid of his disappointment, on hearing that she was not coming after all, burnt the resolve a little deeper in his heart.

One morning in May of 1927 his car rolled up to the side entrance of the Ritz in Arlington Street, and he stepped out. He was wanting to feel serene and full of glee, but his breathing was irregular and his hand shook as he closed the door of the car. Ten seconds and he would be seeing Mary, who waited in the entrance hall. He would know again what her features were. Up the steps at a run—for surely one was full of glee—and there she was, coming towards him down the long corridor with a little inchoate, twisting smile.

"Well, here we are, Mary!" He took both her hands.

"Yes, isn't it just marvellous?"

"My turn to bring the car to the hotel door this time."

"Oh, it's great."

"My dear, it's wonderful."

And yet he had taken a slight, a very slight, fall of disappointment, and he knew that she, studying his face, had taken the same fall too. Memory and dream had created one Mary—one Tony—and they must alter a little, shrink a little, to fit the real person. And the real Mary, this smiling stranger, was beautiful enough, God save us! Her nose was small and straight and soft, was it—her searching eyes a dog's brown, her black hair very glossy and faintly waved; her neck very

white? Her dress to-day was all sapphire blue; a small felt hat, a jumper with low belt, and a pleated skirt whose pleats opened and swayed with her movement. Her legs were in stockings of sunburn silk, and her feet in brown strap shoes. And as she walked she had a way of pointing her left toe more than her right. He had never noticed this before. It was enchanting.

"Now, child," said he, releasing one hand but retaining the other as he led her towards the car, "you gave me one whole day in New York. I shall therefore give three times as much to you."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that I am going to purloin three whole days out of your seven in London."

"Why, yes. Of course. That'll be just marvellous."

"I may even take four," said Tony, thus emboldened.

To this she gave only a dubious lift of her shoulders.

"No," said Tony promptly. "Four would be absurd."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mary. "We'll see. There's Daddy to be thought of. He must be made happy, for he's quite a dear—really."

"I am sure he is."

"And"—her eyes turned mischievous, as she shocked him with an Americanism—"the big guy gets angry if——"

Strange that the slang phrase *did* hurt him! It was as if a breath of doubt had misted some impossibly exquisite picture. This old note of childish levity, why did it make her different from what he wanted? And what *did* he want? He didn't know; he knew only that he wanted Mary Leith to be the thing that he wanted.

"Well, come and get in the car, my dear, if we've so little time together."

"Yes. Oh, heck! I'm thrilled—so thrilled! Where are we going to?"

Where were they going to? Sitting in the driver's seat, Tony, whose mind always leapt to see a parable in a simple incident, immediately gave to these words their deeper meaning.

"I don't know, Mary. It's for you to say."

"You're never very helpful, are you? That's what you said in New York."

"Ah, well. . . . The Abbey, I suppose . . . and St. Paul's. . . ."

"Oh, *please*. . . . *Yes*."

So together they visited the Abbey and St. Paul's; and leading her among the quiet aisles, Tony spoke, since he must speak of something, of architectural periods, Norman, Early English, Tudor, Renaissance. And Mary was interested—sometimes. When interested her answers were intelligent, though uninformed. At other times he knew that she was interested with only half her mind; the other half seemed to be resting idly in a happiness which it did not understand, as when a child rests against someone it loves.

There was a wonderful summer light in the streets of London when again he was driving her through them; London was a city of shining mist and golden buildings beneath a pale blue sky; and of a sudden she lolled back in her seat, happy, and exclaimed, "Oh, this is best. Listen: let's just drive on and on quietly. May we?"

Then they were driving on and on, he sometimes pointing out "the places of historic interest" or the places of his childhood's memory. She was interested in both, but much more in those of his childhood's memory. Kensington High Street, along whose pavement-kerbs he had so often, at six years old, been either a steam-engine or a tram—"Oh, what a darling!" St. Austin's Road, with his father's church, where Keatings, pretending to be blind, had been led by Derek's hand into the Children's Service, his eyes tight closed and his body bumping into every child he passed, while Peggy and Tony came giggling and apprehensive behind, and waiting for a vision of the Wrath of God—"Oh, what an *adorable* family you must have been!"—St. Paul's School and Colet Court, where he had been most justly whacked—"Oh, I'm sure you didn't deserve it! But tell me some more. I *am* enjoying this."

"Gosh, and it all happened years before you even existed! I wish it hadn't."

"Why?"

"Because it makes me old enough to be your father."

"Oh, hardly that."

"Yes, hardly that. Don't let's be old enough to be anybody's fathers."

The Broadway. Barnes Common. Richmond. The River. They had lunch at a quiet restaurant, and most of the time he was silent.

"A penny for your thoughts!" she said, so tritely as to disappoint him again. Hang it, what *did* he want?

"What need for you to waste your pence, my child? You must know."

"I don't. What are they?"

There was no answer but in his eyes, which smiled at her teasingly.

"Oh, do tell me."

"I was thinking about you."

"What about me?"

"I was wondering why there are some people in the world with whom one can be quite happy so long as they are at one's side. There *are* a few people like that, aren't there?"

She lifted her eyes to him.

"Oh, yes . . . yes. . . ." she said.

In the evening when he was bidding her good-bye on the steps of her hotel he said, "Now that I have shown you London, I want to show you England. I should like to show you a great spread of her in a single view. And the best of her. Which, I need hardly say, is Sussex."

"Oh, of course! Sussex is the county you adopted, isn't it?"

"Now how should you know that?"

"Didn't you tell me in New York, eighteen months ago?"

"Yes; but fancy your remembering it! Well, come and look at it to-morrow."

"No, not to-morrow. I must look after Daddy. I must lead him out somewhere. I take him very seriously, you see."

"Certainly you must. The big guy is doubtless rather fond of you. . . . Which day can you give me, then?"

"Listen: what about Thursday?"

"This about Thursday: I shall be here, on this spot, at ten o'clock; and we'll drive to the North Downs, and climb Leith Hill, and you will see the whole of Sussex spread before you. And you will feel like Moses on Mount Pisgah, looking at the Promised Land."

She gave her little skip of delight. "Oh, it's too good to be true. I've always wanted to see Sussex."

"Since when?"

"Oh, gracious, I don't know! Since you told me about it in New York."

"Well, you shall see it from Leith Hill, which bears your

name—have you noticed that, Mary Leith? That's why I chose it."

"Oh, don't be so dumb! Good-bye, till Thursday;" and she ran into the hotel.

Tony and Mary stood side by side on the crown of Leith Hill, with the bracken about their feet, and a silence in the sky. The old familiar landscape lay spread beneath their eyes; the same landscape, only seen from the North, that Tony and Jill Daubeney had looked down upon, twelve years before, when they stood together on Wolstonbury's crown. The Weald billowed away, a tossed carpet of tillage and meadow, whose hedgerows patterned it into diamonds and squares, and whose woods lay dark on it like massed embroidery. And behind all this, between a haze and the sky, ran the long parade of the South Downs, with Wolstonbury standing in front, its foot in the haze. Tony pointed to the little individual things: the mansions and the twisting lanes, the clustered villages and the far-off spires; and Stratton Lye where he had taught his boys, and Albourne where he had lived in his little cottage of Sheep's Eye.

They sat down; and as in the churches he had talked of architecture, so here, since he must talk of something, he talked of geological structure: of the great dome of chalk which had once joined the North to the South Downs, till the action of water had washed its heart away and moulded the wide valley of the Sussex Weald, for him to live in and to love. He told her that only here, in Southern Britain, would she find the great chalk downs, because they had lain below the ice-cap. And he pictured the early men of Britain moving east and west along the dry bare ridges, with their fearful glance ever dropping to the wet, wolf-haunted woods below.

She was as flattering a listener as Jill; more so, perhaps, because she was younger, and seemed to rest in his talk as in an element that soothed her. She was bad for him, he said; and having said so, poured out for her one of the great enthusiasms of his life: England. England, so still and so beautiful; of patterns so miniature and so manifold; rolling everywhere into hills and hollows that made play with the light; greener than any other land because she was all pasture, and her pasture

was a deep blue-green ; embroidered everywhere with woodland, and the trees of her woods more varied than any other land could boast—look ! her oaks and beeches and elms, her limes and ashes and chestnuts all dressing themselves for summer in her own slow, hasteless way. Nothing like her anywhere. And the moisture of her earth and her winds and the lazy good-nature of her people had both played their part in making her beautiful ; her earth and her winds, laden with moisture, sooner or later healed the scar of every garish building by covering it with lichen, moss and rusty greens ; and her people, improvising all things, threw their hedges and their roadways where they wanted them, left their villages to muster as they would, and lost every battle but the last. And the birds sang over her all the year round.

Mary heard him out.

“ I should like to live here for ever,” she said.

Tony stood up and, resolving to be English himself, exchanged sentiment for cynicism. Looking over the vast garden of the Weald, he murmured, “ Well, we ought to value her. She’s expensive enough.”

“ How do you mean ? ”

“ She costs us four shillings in every pound, my dear. Still . . . still . . . it might be worse spent. . . . ”

He had fallen into a reverie.

“ To say nothing of a million lives,” he added.

He led her down the red path through the bracken, and for the first time in their friendship—after all, this was but the third day they had spent together and Tony had no gift for philandering ; he wanted to love terribly, not to philander—he put his arm into hers, and finding her wrist, clasped his fingers round it. She did nothing and said nothing ; but a little later her arm pressed his for a quick moment against her side. It was no more, perhaps, than the venting of a deep affection, but it fed to flame his hope that he would be able to love her as he desired.

Walking down the twisted track, he let his gaze rest unseen upon her. He watched that dainty pointing of her left foot.

“ Tired ? ” he asked.

“ A little.”

So he slowed their step, but said nothing ; and it was she who suddenly exclaimed, “ Oh, but I’m happy ! I’m happy ! ”

Tony smiled. "Yes, we've had another wonderful day. And to think that it's only our third together!"

"Yes, I feel as if I had known you always."

"I do too."

They were strolling on, and within his silence he was sifting and weighing his thoughts about her. What did he want of her? First, he wanted to believe her the ideal creature whom he had waited so long to love. And was she not this? Oh, yes—it was only that childish lightness which made him doubt at times. She was young; she was beautiful; she had humour and gaiety; she had intelligence—more than she knew, for she would often bemoan her stupidity; she had moods of pensiveness which hinted at depths yet to be sounded; above all, she was loving—that affectionate pressure of his arm! He loved her then: it was exultation, it was release, it was peace to know it. . . . Stay, though: he knew also that he was out to awake in her an irremediable adoration, no less, which probably he must leave hungry and suffering in the end. Was this love; or was it a cruel possessiveness? Oh, never let me hurt you, Mary—but he knew that his craving for her adoration was stronger than his desire not to hurt her, and he would go on.

While he was thinking thus, with his arm through her arm, and his hand clasped over the back of her hand, she suddenly gathered his long fingers and threaded them lovingly through her own.

They had one more day together. It was her last day in England before her father and she set forth on their travels in Europe. He spent it driving her to the pleasant green places that lie against London: up to the high levels of Wimbledon and down among the hills and deer of Richmond Park; to any of those littered commons where Londoners, in their starved poetry, go to find a prairie. And in all these places, as he told her, two ghosts of yesterday walked: old Raking, a stocky schoolboy ever breaking prison to find a far horizon, and O'Grogan Minor, rambling with him and hoping he had found a friend. The evening gathered round them; and he gave her a quiet dinner, and drove her back into the lights and traffic of the London night.

Now that day was gone; and Mary was gone too; and he could smile sometimes to think of the wide difference between the Rev. Antony O'Grogan whom the people met in the Thames-mouth streets and the Antony O'Grogan who dwelt in his own head, burdened with thoughts of a slight girl. The outer Tony was a priest nearing forty who was liked in the streets because he had a jest for all; an amusing guest who was welcomed in the drawing-room because he had mischief in his talk; a well-known writer whom the young men called "sir," because his hair was grey at the sides. The inner Tony was no other than O'Grogan Minor, grown older, but again tormented with love. Which of the two was the dream? If he was sometimes ashamed of O'Grogan Minor, he would remember a phrase out of the past. "Powerless. I am always powerless where *this* calls."

Now that Mary was out of his sight he doubted his love no longer. He was a pacing prisoner now, tormented till he knew that he possessed her love. Surely—surely he had it—or was it that she had only inclined towards him in her childish affectionateness? Damn! one could not know. Day followed day, and one knew no more. Each could bring nothing but its silence to answer this pacing questioner. He began almost to *feel* this silence, like walls around him. Oh, to know! to know! Better, if it must be, one sharp pain, and the end of suspense.

They had chatted of books, and especially of that wistful tale which had troubled his boyhood: the tale of Gerda the Shepherdess who had wanted so sadly to possess some one person for herself and had abandoned her hope in the end.

"Oh, I wish I could read it," Mary had said. "I'm sure I'm just like Gerda."

And now he sought in every shop for a copy of that book, but found it nowhere. It had perished twenty years before. So he took down his own copy and wrote in it, "Mary Leith from Antony O'Grogan," and sent it to her father's agents in Paris. When it would reach her, God knew. And one day dispossessed another, and was in its turn dispossessed; and each could only surround with silence his fixed question: "Is she thinking always of me as I am of her?" Now that memory could see her figure but vaguely, as it roved in the mists of Europe, he was creating it into the very symbol of all that he had wanted: Mary Leith

with her black silk hair, her white silk skin and warm loving eyes ; with all those little movements that so delighted him—now a mystified frowning of her eyebrows, one eyebrow tilting higher than the other, now a frustrated lift of her sloping shoulders, now a hopeless raising and dropping of her long oval hand, now, as she walked, that unconscious pointing of her left foot. He wearied of thinking of her ; wearied of his question. There was no healing in this prison-house of silence : he could only beat his thoughts against the walls : “ Mary. . . . Mary. . . . Mary. . . .” Sometimes he heard himself uttering this aloud.

She had emptied all things in the world of interest. Books—he could not read them ; men friends—doubtless he would like them again one day ; women—all the power of their beauty was taken from them. They could not even draw his eyes. And places which memory had bathed in a romantic light because he had loved in them—it was rather sad to think that they could mean so little to him now. The lake of Grandel-mere where he had drifted under the banks with Sybil Chandry ; the lanes by Stratton Lye where he had walked with his thoughts of Frank Doyly ; the crown of Wolstonbury where he had sat and talked with Jill—what were these places to-day ? A sheet of water reflecting pine trees, a leafy road in Sussex, a hill-top in the loneliness of the sky ; not much more. One day would the crown of Leith Hill be no more than these ? Sybil : What was she to him now ? A sentimental memory ; he could bear to hear that she was dead. And Frank Doyly, who *was* dead—only to be remembered at such times as these !

Oh, no : it must not be thus with Mary. He would not let it be. He would vow now that no one else should come into his future and disperse the beauty from the summit of Leith Hill.

What if people knew one’s thoughts ? They would ridicule and despise him ; and yet, one and all, they indulged the same. Like him, they would think as they tossed an unread book on to a chair, “ If the book falls on the seat and stays there, all will be well ; if it slides to the ground, then——” and, did it show a sign of slipping to the ground, they would jump up and stop it. Nowadays hardly a match flew from his hand to the fireplace without the thought accompanying it : “ If it lies on the grating all will be well ; if it slips through, I am done for.” Mary hid behind the corner of every thought,

every action, every sight, and generally revealed her presence before one thought-series gave place to the next. He might escape into lively gossip or intellectual debate, but soon he would remember the prison walls; and they would close upon him again, so that his heart, while his lips gossiped, would be crying, "Mary. . . . Mary."

After twelve days a letter came from Mary; and the sight of her handwriting drove him into the privacy of his study. As he tore the envelope he told himself to expect little, and so to cheat disappointment of its mark. And this is what he read:

"I have just got the book and thank you a thousand times. I shall like it so much better because it is your copy. I am having an absolutely gorgeous time with Daddy and I think he is quite happy too. Still, I shall be glad when the time comes to turn back to England. I love England best—ever so much best.

*"Yours rather affectionately,
"Mary Leith.*

"P.S.—Why do you spoil me so!!"

That was all: he had had his letter and read it, and known a moment of joy; and now the walls of silence were around him again.

During the next days, as he paced the cell, he would run over and over that letter (he knew it by heart), draining it for some evidence of love. She had written at once . . . she had liked the book better because it was his . . . she was wanting to come back to England. . . . But how could she be having "an absolutely gorgeous time," when he was suffering like this? And the letter was so brief! Surely if her mind was wrapped up in him, she would be compelled to write at length for her own relief. . . .

That was what *he* did. He sat down and wrote at unjustifiable length to her; and the creation of this letter was much easier, and much more joyous, than was the creation of a chapter for his book, these days. When he was writing a book, emotion might have to be whipped up; when he was writing to Mary, it drove him. He built up a merry, bantering letter largely out of her own favourite words and phrases. "Listen: you will kindly write in great detail next time, Mary Leith, and not be so dumb. Yes, that'll be just marvellous."

The letter posted, there was nothing but days of silence and

waiting. Days of everlasting calculation: "She must have got it on Monday, or, at the latest, Tuesday. If she really cares for me she will answer the same night. That means I should get her answer on Thursday—or Friday, at the latest." Though he did not believe that he would be disappointed, he steadied himself against disappointment, should Friday pass with no letter, or the letter come and be cold. But in imagination he suffered the pain of that disappointment, and it was so crushing, so sickening; it so sank the heart and tightened the head that he found himself exclaiming, "Oh, to be quit of all this, and free again!" but, even as he said it, his whole being rose up and denied this denial. He had wanted all this; and he had got it; and, suffering it, he was exultantly happy.

Her beloved handwriting dropped from the letter-box to the floor on the Thursday night—ah, good! then something had compelled her to answer at once. He hurried into his room and drank the letter there. It was very brief—*damnably* brief—and *damnably* impudent—but——!

"This is another short letter, and purposely so, to show you that I am not in the least moved by your rebukes and have no intention of obeying you—ever, but as a matter of fact, there's no sense in writing, anyway, as I shall be back in five days after you get this, and you will kindly listen to me while I tell you absolutely everything in great detail. Oh, how 'jolly'—your English word and so stupid! We've had a 'topping' time. 'Topping'—did you ever hear anything so dumb?—Yours indignantly, but on the whole with some love, Mary."

Next morning Mr. Broadley met him in the High Street and stopped him. "Ah, O'Grogan, the very man, the very man! I wanted to get in touch with you."

"Yes, Vicar?"

And Tony looked inquiringly into the coarse, round face. But he was not searching there for the Vicar's instructions; he was seeing the heavy cheeks, the sagged pouches under the eyes, the sparse and languid hair; and receiving another instruction.

"It's about next Sunday, O'Grogan. I shall want you to address the Booksellers' Conference Service, when the Mayor'll be there. You'll be the right man for that!"

"Right-ho, Vicar!"

But the real message that Tony had received from Mr.

Broadley was, "I am heavy, coarse, and over sixty, and my time for love and romance is past."

"I should have liked to address the Conference Service myself," explained the Vicar, "but I've—I've been invited to preach in the Cathedral that day, and I feel I ought to give it the precedence, don't you think so?"

"Certainly. I'll look after the Booksellers," answered Tony.

But his real answer was, "I am forty this year; and I am not going on into middle age without taking another chance of love."

"You see," continued the Vicar, "it's the sudden death of Prebendary Cowper that has done this. They wanted to know if I would take his place."

"Oho, Vicar!"—Mary was his last chance. It was her or none. He was not going through this anguish again, for it burnt too deep. "Does that mean they are going to give you his stall?"—Oh, yes, take her, perhaps for always, perhaps for only a little while; but salve *something* with Mary. His marriage was unreal, and his churchmanship was unreal, and life was slipping by. Salve something rich and memorable, while there was time——

"I don't know about that. I'm not thinking about that," said the Vicar—"My dear man, what a genial liar you are!"—but I feel that, if they're in a difficulty I ought to step into the breach. I wouldn't have consented if I hadn't thought you were precisely the man for the Booksellers."

Perhaps for always? Why not? If she would take him on those terms, he might break with everything and marry her. One could live but once; and at sixty he wasn't going to look back on a life gone sterile for want of courage——

"Oh, I'll talk to the Booksellers all right."

—Oh, yes, yes. For always, if she would have him. He was not going to take Mary and squander her as his mistress of a year. He had never wanted that. It was never her body he had wanted so much as her love. Strange; he had always been like that; had always wanted to receive an adoration, and to give it; with but secondary thoughts of physical pleasure. Her kisses and her embrace would be very lovely, but chiefly for their meaning——

"Yes, but don't go giving them one of your provocative sermons, my boy. Remember Scrase'll be there, and it's no

use ruffling him unnecessarily. You won't change him now ; and he's one of the best, really."

"I'll be gentle, Vicar. I'm very fond of the old man."

What a triumph for the Scrases and all his other critics if he broke with everything and married Mary ! But what would he care ? They could have their little triumph, poor dull souls, and he would have life, while there was time——

"Very good ; that's settled, is it, O'Grogan ?"

"Yes, Vicar."

"Right, then. Good-bye."

And an ageing man, whose day was much too late for love, hurried away towards the only ambition that was left to him ; while Tony, whose day was turning the meridian, walked in the breathless companionship of a new idea. "Why not ? Why not ? It might be inconceivably beautiful. It is something that a few people have found, but I have never known."

PART III

CHAPTER I

THE BEECHWOOD UNDER WOLSTONBURY

THERE is a beechwood under Wolstonbury, resting against the lower slope of the great down. In summer its tilted floor is a lake of dog's-mercury, on which the sun, spearing through the branches, lays sheets and marges of golden light. A pathway winds through it, climbing on shelves to the uppermost trees and on to the wide empty turf of the down. At places the knuckled roots of the beeches make the path a stairway of broad steps, and you stride from one step to another, arousing a whisper among the dead leaves. Shrubs of thorn and maple and guelder-rose flank the stairway, and tangled hazel bushes, and clumps of the wayfaring tree.

The afternoon was dropping its gold on the lake of dog's-mercury when Antony O'Grogan and Mary Leith came into the wood and wandered slowly up the steep path. To help her up the path he put his arm through hers, gently propelling her by the shoulder; and she, as the darkness of the trees fell around them, gathered his fingers and laced them through her own, as her fashion was. They were not talking much: sometimes he pointed to the long-aged stems of traveller's-joy which twisted and festooned themselves among the trees, thick as quayside ropes; sometimes he named the flowers and herbs around them; rock-roses and fig-wort and spindleberry, and the green liver-wort on the boles of the beeches. Once he halted and picked a leaf from a shrub which had brushed his arm.

"Maple, my dear," he said. "*Your* leaf."

"Why?"

"Canada's leaf, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

She took it with her unoccupied hand, and kept it dangling at her side.

The path becoming steeper, he withdrew his arm from her elbow and put it against her waist to help her upward; and she, a few minutes after, allowed her arm to find its way around his waist. Delight pierced him, and he pressed her against his side; and she, for a second, returned the pressure.

They left the path, and, breaking through the trees and shrubs, clambered down to the hollow, and on to the ankle-deep carpet of dog's-mercury leaves. He halted on the slope under the greatest of the beech trees.

"Here we'll sit," said he.

"Yes. I feel so tired. . . . I don't know why."

So they sat—or lay, rather—in the dark green leaves which lifted around their weight to the level of their breasts. Tony, turning a glance towards Mary, saw her as if floating in a sea of leaves.

"Isn't it still, Mary?"

"Yes."

"Not a bird singing anywhere."

"And not a breath of wind."

He looked about him. He saw the sunlight glinting on the liver-wort which greened the boles; and, below them, beyond the last of the trees, the spread of an oat-field which was the colour of a flushed apricot, under the sun. Turning his face round and up, he saw above the branches the bare turf climbing to the crown of Wolstonbury. And that other contemplative Tony, who could always stand aside and watch the active Tony, remembered instantly the long talk on Wolstonbury's top with Jill Daubeney twelve years before. He had stuttered then his newest creed: that a man must climb out of the lushness of personal needs up to the bare, bleak beauty of wide, impersonal things. Out of the woods and gardens, and up to where the hills were bare. It was just after his love for Honor had collapsed; and just before the war broke. "We'll to the woods no more, *les lauriers sont coupés*." That was twelve years before, and here he was to-day, not on the summit of Wolstonbury, but in the shimmering wood at its foot. With Mary lying beside him, and a white delight of anticipation emptying all his body.

"Only three o'clock, Mary. We might spend an hour here, or even two—before going back to the car."

"Oh, do let's. It's all so peaceful."

Her arm lay between them, its hand stroking the leaves. Tony sat up and idly pulled a leaf to pieces. Then, without looking at her, he felt for her hand and laid his own upon it.

"Mary, may I tell you something?"

She did not answer.

"Mary, have you long ago guessed that I love you?"

Perhaps she started, but she said nothing: only her hand turned over and closed round his.

"My dear, I think I loved you the first time I saw you—no, don't let me tell any lies. I nearly fell in love with you then, but I forgot you shamefully soon. I love you now."

She was staring ahead of her, as he turned to her with the question, "Mary, what do you feel for me? Do you love me?" Her lips moved to speak, but did not; and his heart, unwarrantably, began to founder. It began to beat with fright.

"I don't know," she said at last. "I love being with you. I love it more than I can say."

But this was not enough to salve his happiness: it hung between living and dying till she, looking up at his averted face and feeling for his need, said quickly:

"I am happy when I am with you . . . and so unhappy when I am away from you."

This should have been enough for any man; and Tony's heart did indeed leap upward into the delight of assurance; but he was of the kind that could not be content with less than the perfect word, and to hint that he needed more, he began to draw his hand sadly away. At once she closed on it and held it tight.

"Oh, yes, yes. . . . Of course I do. . . . I know it."

Neither spoke nor moved. Mary sighed deeply.

"What am I to do, Mary? Am I to leave you, and see you no more after to-day——?"

"Oh, no, no," she pleaded, in a sudden fear. "I want to be with you a little longer. I can't give you up—yet. . . ."

He stole his arm around her shoulders, and for a long minute stared down into her face which was staring back, rather dazed, into his. He looked at her lips which in a moment he would kiss. Then he drew her towards him, and nothing existed except the pressure of their lips, from which neither could draw

away. Soon he felt that her hand was stroking his hair, and, in answer, he forced her lips apart and drew her willing body tighter against him.

With a sigh he withdrew at last from that first embrace, and laid her back in the leaves, that he might study the beauty of her face and try, with whimsical eyes, to believe. . . . And she smiled at him for this humorous survey. Then quietly, just gratefully, he kissed everything about her face that he had loved : the brown eyes, the full but narrow cheeks, the white forehead, and the black silk hair. And he drew a finger along her lips. She smiled again, at this treatment, and he laid a hand gently on the rise of one of her breasts. She placed both her own hands over this resting hand of his and pressed it closer.

"Mary, I love you."

"And I you . . . Tony."

"Mary, I want to be loyal to this love."

"What do you mean, dear?"

He picked a leaf to pieces without answering.

"Tony : tell me what you meant when you said that?"

"That I am ready to change the whole pattern of my life and come to you."

"Ah, but——"

"Ah, but what, Mary?"

"But one stops loving. *You* know that."

"Yes . . . sometimes one does."

"Well, then——?"

"But Mary : I can't feel—at present—that I should ever do that with you. I would study to keep this love. God, I wouldn't *dare* to lose it. That would be *too* awful! And it seems to me different from anything I've felt before. I have never felt such an amazing tenderness for anyone. I suppose it's due to my great age."

She frowned her humorous impatience with him, and one eyebrow tilted a little higher than the other. "Don't be so dumb!"

"Listen! That *is* a bird singing somewhere. Do you hear it? *There!*"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Blackcap or whitethroat."

"And there are others too. . . . Gosh, have they been singing all the time?"

"I suppose so. That's a yellow-hammer right above us. Mary, if we really love each other, shouldn't we have the courage to——"

"Oh, but I might fail you, I might fail you! If you gave up everything for me, I should be so terrified of failing you." She gazed down through the branches at the oat-field, where a light breeze ran, making the tint of the oats paler as it passed.

"How could you fail me?"

"I am rather stupid, really. You don't know me. Think of all your bright and clever friends, and how ashamed you'd be of me—once you had stopped loving me like this."

"Mary Leith, you lie! You lie every way. You are amazingly intelligent. Sometimes I suspect that you will be brilliant one day. And how could I ever be ashamed of anything so beautiful as you?"

"I am not beautiful. A passable face, perhaps, but I've got no figure."

"You are very beautiful. I do not propose to argue with you about it."

"Well, then, I am often moody and discontented. And I am marvellously selfish sometimes."

"Mary Leith, you are *not*!"

"I *am*, I tell you!" Once again she frowned her humorous impatience, but her eyes were still on the oat-field. "I have known this Mary Leith of yours for twenty years, and I know she's a thoroughly commonplace little slut, really."

"She is easily the most loving and delightful child I have ever known."

"Ah, but she's been on her best behaviour with you. You should see her sometimes. Sometimes I have nothing but contempt for her, she seems so utterly selfish."

"Well, then, she *is*, sometimes. We all are."

"She would be all right as long as she went on loving you—but oh, supposing I stopped loving you!" Now her eyes were on him. "I don't feel as if I ever could, but oh—how does one *know*? How does one *know*?"

"Dearest, I should make it the task of my life to hold your love, and to keep my love for you. Mary, haven't I learned that there's one thing in the world better worth striving for than anything else? If I join my life with yours, I'm going to build

the only thing worth having. I'm not going to fail, and I'm not going to let you fail."

"Tony! . . ."

He took her into his arms, that he might receive her gratitude for this; and after they had kissed, looked down into her face and asked, "What do you say then, Mary?"

"Oh, don't ask me to say anything now, Tony. I can't."

"Shall we just wait then, my dear? Shall we just see as much of each other as possible, and wait and hope?"

"But is it right? Is it right?"

"Listen, Mary." Holding her there and fixing her eyes, he quoted:

"He looked at her as a lover can,
She looked at him as one who awakes:
The Past was a sleep, and her life began.

Is that true, Mary?"

"Oh, yes . . .! So true!"

"So true for me, too. Are we, then, to smother life, and turn away from it?"

"But isn't that the old, old excuse for doing wrong?"

"Or for doing right. Who knows?"

"No . . . wrong . . . wrong . . ."

"Mary, do you really think that?"

"Yes . . . at least, I think I do. . . ."

"Then I must go from you, of course——" he began to release her—"and to-day. . . . It is over, Mary."

"Oh, no, no! No, don't go. Let us wait and see—just for a little. I can't give you up—not yet."

They were clasped in each other's arms again, and her passion rose to compete with his. She, no less than he, forced the lips on hers apart to find a deeper and deeper kiss. It was while they swayed in this rivalry that the sound of voices cut them apart. Voices on the pathway above them, and the laugh, unmistakable, of those who have surprised two lovers at their sport. Tony played guiltily with the leaves, and Mary lay back on an elbow, trembling. The voices and the footsteps passed up the track, and out of hearing.

"Tony, could they have recognized you?"

"Me? Of course not, dearest."

"But I could swear I heard your name. I heard the name O'Grogan."

"No, you're imagining it."

"But you used to live near here, didn't you?"

"Yes, but it's five long years since I was here. Come back to me."

And she came back into his embrace. Then tenderly he laid her down in the leaves, and his hand touched her arm and breast and knee. His frame was shaking as he stared down upon her face. And she stared up at him, and passed her hand over his hair and round his neck; or stroked his forehead to smooth a wrinkle away, while she smiled. A speck fell from a branch on to her face, and he brushed it away, smiling too. Then he lay down and held her close, for a long hour, till a tiredness drained all his body—an exhaustion—even a weariness with love. Such a tiredness that his body might have been in the first threat of a fever; it was cold and trembling. He sat up and rested his elbows on his knees, while she lay in the leaves beside him, white and tired too.

"Come," he said, standing up. "We had better go." He looked behind. "I must remember this exact spot. Let's see; the largest of the beech-trunks, with three unhappy little yews around. Heaven knows: I may come back here one day, a sentimental ghost. . . ."

She was standing now, and he took her to him. "My beloved!"

"My dearest!"

After the kiss, Mary turned with a sigh and toiled ahead of him up the slope. Her figure sagged a little; and just for that second she looked unlike any Mary he had known. Her face was out of view, and her body was spoiled by its drooping. For that second—for a horrid moment of time, not two heart-beats long, the thought flashed in him: "Perhaps, after all, I don't love her enough. Perhaps it will be best to enjoy her for a little and lose her, and escape the strain of breaking with the past." No other than Tony, it may be, would have heard this tiny thought that flashed in his weariness; but him it sickened. "Oh, no! Never let me hurt you, Mary. I love you as I've never loved anyone else before. I want only to give you everything." And he hurried to where she walked, and put an arm around her to help her up the slope. She leaned against him; and they went out of the wood, quietly and almost sadly.

CHAPTER II

A FOLDER THROUGH THE POST

THERE was a deep-rooted humility in Tony which was amazed, sometimes, that anyone so beautiful as Mary could love him. She was one, surely, who could pick and choose among men, and she chose to give her love to him, and to give it with a completeness that filled up the most extravagant of his dreams. He had moments when this tremendous fact seemed almost incredible—but there it stood, stubborn before his eyes.

And if Tony was humble, Mary was more than humble; she had an excessive distrust of herself. She told him that she would sit for hours and hours, trying to understand why he—he of all people—should love her. She told him that for two days after the beechwood she had gone about her business stupefied; seeing nothing and hearing nothing, and, in short, behaving like a perfect fool. And he kissed her for her folly.

She bewildered him: walking at his side, she blent all the sparkle, the diffidence, the simple adoration of a child; in his arms she shed all this, and was an impassioned woman. They had found a cave in a garden by the Thames—a cave whose walls were shrubbery and whose roof was the spread of a sycamore tree—and here they would enjoy long days of companionship. On entering it, he would stand before her, smile, and draw her to him for an inaugural kiss; and she would come with her eyes closed, her head thrown back for the alighting of his kiss, and all of her body that was below the grasp of his arm pressed forward against him. Her lips would move as if she smiled in her sleep.

One day, this inaugural matter performed, he sat down on the

grass and put out his arms for her. But she stood above him with her hat in her hand; and suddenly tossed back her hair and said, "Oh, I could roar!"

"Do, my child."

"I'm so happy. So happy."

"Come."

"No." She sat abruptly at his side and stretched her legs before her, foot over foot. "Tell me a story."

"Good God!"

"Yes, anything you like. I am in the mood for a good long story."

"Story! I can't tell stories!"

"Yes, you can. It's your business, isn't it?"

"Very good, lady. Very good, then; you shall have it."

And after pretending to profound thought, he began. In correct professional style he began with a description of the *mise en scène*. This, it seemed, was a city of towering white palaces and most extraordinary dins; and it was called New York. Then he described a girl who dwelt in this city; and while painting her beauty he rose to heights of very great eloquence. Her eyes, he explained, were normally of a velvety brown but would change sometimes into a dark glinting blue, like a pool beneath cypress trees——

"Not so much description," Mary interrupted.

"The description of the heroine is of paramount importance," said Tony. "Well, it chanced that there arrived in the same city a windy and tedious Lecturer, as ugly as sin itself. And one morning when he was sated with life, and very lonely, he went to the doors of the palace where he was resting—a grotesque, overheated place—and whom should he see on the marble steps, like the promise of better things—whom should he see, I say——?"

Mary broke in:

"Now I'll continue that story. You're telling it badly. There was once in the City of New York a girl of very usual face and very ordinary parts. I don't know what parts are, but hers were ordinary. She was vain and selfish, and not half as pretty as she liked to think herself. In intelligence she was wanting. And one day she had occasion to go to a hotel to look after a male creature, and she dressed herself in a blue dress which she imagined became her well——"

"It did——"

“Yes ; so this vain woman whom we shall hereinafter refer to as——”

“The Radiant Vision,” suggested Tony.

“Don’t keep interrupting—whom we shall hereinafter refer to as The Slut—she went to the hotel, and while she stood on the steps looking through the glass doors and pretending not to, she saw approaching the Assemblance of a Man. And it seemed to her an agreeable sight. And this—this Being invited her to drive him about the city. So she hurried home, but did not get her car straight away, but ran up to her room, and there, like the cunning Slut she was, she tired her hair and powdered her nose and gave her face some colour, of which, by nature, she had none, and arranged her dress till it liked her ; and when she had fully assembled herself, she hurried back with the car to the hotel that she might see again the afore-mentioned Being. And, sure enough, there he was, standing behind the glass doors, looking miserable and perfectly sweet.”

“On the contrary,” said Tony, “he was feeling amazingly happy, and wondering why.”

“Well, anyhow, they drove away—they drove and drove like a pair of idiots, and in the course of the drive the Being asked her to kiss him, and the Slut refused ; though—again, dear reader, we remind you that she was thoroughly deceitful—though, to tell the truth, there was nothing she would have liked better——”

“Ah, bless you !” exclaimed Tony. And he took her there and then and kissed her.

That kiss drove the child out of her. In both of them frivolity flared up into passion. The sweat broke on his brow as he drank of her rich offering ; and again and again he brushed the moisture from him, but once a drop fell on to her face, and as he was about to wipe it, in distress, away, she sighed, “Don’t. I love it.” When they were sated with loving—even repelled by it—they broke apart and exchanged it for the gay companionship of friends. Mary jumped up, and smoothed her crumpled frock, and moaned for her dishevelled hair. She let it fall and began to comb its wildness away, but he cried, “Stop ! You lovely hamadryad.”

“What on earth’s that ?”

“A nymph of the trees with wild hair. Leave it.”

She left it as it was ; and they sat and talked of her school,

her home and her friends, till a wave of love lifted them out of the trough of mere happy companionship, and they were seeking ecstasy again.

That was the sparkling Mary, and the ardent Mary. There was also a serious child in her, who pleased him no less. More, probably, when, alone in his study, he was recalling her manners and her words. This serious child would throw up out of her pensiveness quick, sudden, unrelated sentences which surprised him, because they seemed to spring from wells deeper than any she was conscious of, or he had suspected. So often in their chatter together she would cap some commonplace sentence of his with a nobler sentence of her own! Once she was depreciating herself in her usual fashion, knitting her brows and telling the distance, "No, I don't understand it. That you should love me, who am so stupid, when you must meet lots of other women who have beauty and brains and everything that makes attractiveness"—she shook her head. "I just think and think about it, and I don't understand it."

"My dear," he said, "if only you *could* understand! Why, sometimes I make up my mind that I must begin straightaway to make myself worthy of you, in case one day . . ."

"Ah, but even if nothing comes of all this," she answered quickly, picking a long grass, "it did happen, didn't it? And I've made up my mind that, even if I never have you, I'm going to try to be worthy of what has been. I never expected anything like this."

If ever Antony O'Grogan loved Mary Leith perfectly, he loved her as she said that.

"Tell me . . ." she began one day, and hesitated.

"Tell you what?" he encouraged.

Her mouth pursed up with the difficulty of speech, and a smile broke it apart. Tony watched with delight those movements of her mouth. They were lying side by side in a punt which he had moored behind an island of the Thames. Between the trees of the island he could see the stretch of Ham Fields. To their left lay Strawberry Vale.

"Tell me," she began again—"you are very wise——"

"No," he protested; "I am beginning to wonder if I understand anything at all."

"You are very clever indeed, and you know it. Tell me . . . oh, lord 'a' mercy, isn't it difficult?"

She sat upright so as to be able, by stern concentration, to

come at this matter; and Tony, lolling on the cushions and waiting for it, became more fully aware of her clothes—a broad-brimmed panama hat, a sleeveless frock of white silk with a belt of scarlet leather, flesh-coloured stockings, and white sandals. Himself was in tennis flannels and a white cardigan. She removed the panama hat, patted her hair into place, and turned to him with the shy twisted smile at her mouth and an ashamed inquiry in her lifted eyebrows.

“Tell me: is it possible to start training one’s taste for art and books and all that, so late as twenty-one?”

“One is very near the end at such an age,” chaffed Tony. “The attempt seems hardly worth while.”

“No, don’t laugh at me,” she begged. “I’m very serious about all this. I’ve got it into my head that I want to start at once learning all about everything on earth.”

“Is that all? Why be content with so little?”

“Oh, do be quiet! I want to make a confession. Listen: when you were talking about architecture in Westminster Abbey and about geology on Leith Hill, I was interested, of course, but only because I liked to hear your voice, and not—if you understand—because the subjects interested me. I longed for you to leave them and go on talking about yourself. And now that seems to me rather silly.”

“Unpardonably silly.”

“Yes; and I’m quite different now. Oh, I’ve learned such a lot about myself in the last few days—since——”

“Since when?”

“Since that day in the beechwood. I think—if you understand—that it almost frightened me into a sight of myself—and I suddenly wanted to be big enough for you. I don’t suppose I shall ever have you—my common sense just cries to me that I never shall—but there’s no harm in playing a little game of ‘Let’s pretend,’ is there?”

Again she turned on him the inquiring eyebrows, but he was too moved to answer.

“I call it my game of ‘If only!’ ‘If only it might have been . . .’ and I like to think that I shouldn’t have failed you at any point. I’ve only just seen that, in the past, all my friends who have taken me to dances have really thought of me as no more than a plaything to whom they could talk their silly flirtatious stuff——”

“Damn them, damn them, damn them,” muttered Tony.

"Yes—and oh, it's been so marvellous the way you've poured out to me all the ideas that interest you. You stutter and get excited and all worked up. And you look so sweet! I never love you quite so much as when you're doing that. And I can never think of any bright answers for you. It's so sad! Listen: shall I tell you—since I'm being bold and brazen this afternoon—that all the time you're doing that, I'm saying to myself, 'Oh, you dear thing! I want to be with you always, and do everything for you.'"

Mary, as she said this, pulled a stalk from the bank and played with it; and Tony laid a grateful hand over hers.

"And now," she pursued, "you've got to answer this: can one change one's moral character at twenty-one?"

"Is yours so bad?"

"No—not *bad*. But not good enough. Not—" her head went down over the stalk—"now that this has happened. I think I'm shallow and light and selfish."

"Shallow! Shallow!" murmured Tony, amazed at her inability to understand herself. "And selfish! *Selfish*, said she!"

"Yes, I *am* selfish. For instance, I oughtn't to be doing with you—what I am doing now. I ought to have the courage to give you up for—for others' sake. But I just haven't got it at present."

"Nor I," said Tony; and added, "Or is the courage wanted to go on?"

Mary shook her head many times, over the stalk which she was shaping into knots.

"Tell me another thing," she asked. "I sometimes wonder if I could love you so tremendously if you weren't so much older than me. Sometimes the wonder of it seems to be that anyone seventeen years older than I am, and ever so much cleverer, should care to come into my arms and be able to get something from me. Is that sense?"

"My dear," answered Tony, "if it's wonderful for you, isn't it a hundred times more wonderful for me? Have you ever thought what it means to a disgruntled old boor——"

"Ah, don't be silly," whispered Mary—

"—to a tired, middle-aged man when he finds that a child is ready to take him into her embrace and bear with him and comfort him——?"

Now Mary laid her hand on his.

They spoke but little after that. It was late afternoon, and

the falling sun seemed to command a silence. They idled with the grasses at their side, or pulled down the leaves from an overhanging bough. The evening deepened, and a shiver of wind blew along the water. Mary sank from it into her cushions.

"Cold?" he asked.

"It's turned a little cold," she allowed.

He stood up and, removing his white woollen coat, put it around her shoulders, slipping her bare arms into its long sleeves. Then he dragged the punt-pole from its deep bite in the river's bed.

"Home now."

Gently he propelled the punt towards its home. Ham Fields—Eel Pie Island—Old Richmond: they reminded him of an evening, far in the past, when he rowed Peggy down this stretch of the river, after sailing up it at noon. This evening, as then, the houses on the eastern bank, staring into the sun's face, were luminous themselves and threw long twinkling reflections on the water; while the sun-rays, on the opposite bank, took stealthy cover and peeped from the undergrowth and the willows. More than twenty years had gone since that day, and yet he felt little different from the boy of sixteen who had rowed Peggy home. He had been thinking then, he remembered, that a day would come when he would row, not a sister, but a lover home through an evening light; and he had plied his oars very quietly, happy with this thought.

This evening he thrust with his pole very quietly, and drew it wet through his fingers, recalling the things that Mary had said. "I want to be with you always, and do everything for you." Never again would he find so dear a nature.

In these first days she became a craving, like the craving for a drug. After a day of happiness with her, he would return home and enjoy one day of satisfied thoughts; and then, with the next morning, the hunger was restive again. Where was she now; what was she doing at this minute?—oh, this undefeatable wall of silence! The hunger, swelling, would demand its relief, and he found it in the writing of a long, passionate letter to her. The letter written, he was calm again; it had acted like a sex relief.

And yet that other watching Tony could worry over a colour of cruelty he saw in his tenderness. Why was he driven always to heighten her love by fanning it with little winds of jealousy and doubt? Why must he so often speak of other women whom he had met since last with her? Why would he even hurt her, sometimes, by talk of Honor and her goodness as a wife? Why did he know, quite surely, that he would hold back from nothing which would fix her love for ever, even though her life were marred thereby?

How could he have done—this he was to ask himself till the end of his days—that which he did now?

A long bulky envelope, addressed in Peggy's hand, lay on Honor's plate. She broke it open, and something stiff, folded, and highly coloured fell to the table. She read the letter, examined the folder, and cried:

"Oh, Tony, do let's, do let's! We must. I've wanted to do it all my life."

The pitiableness of her peace! She suspected nothing and was happy; she was content, as she had been for many years, with their low-lying plain of friendship. For weeks his kiss and his words of endearment had been no more than those of a brother; and she had not even noticed this. And here this morning, over the friendly gossip of the breakfast table, she was showing him Peggy's letter, and the folding prospectus, which it had enclosed, of a cruise in the Norwegian fjords.

"We *must* do it, Tony. We can afford these things now. Oh, isn't it nice to have some money at last?"

He took the folder, and, opening it out, studied its pictures of austere cliffs whose ravines and gorges broke down to the water. Gallipoli. But these gorges were much steeper and darker than the Gallipoli gorges. How remote Gallipoli was! How dimmed and grey! He had lived in its ravines, while two nations crumbled their edges away in their friction together, and the fall of his friends was a daily drama; and yet Gallipoli had not disturbed him as Mary had done. It had thrilled him, but it had remained outside and around him; only in moments of fear for himself had it come within. God, what egotists men were! That the reciprocal slaughter of two peoples should affect one less than a dark-eyed girl!

"Oh, do say yes!" Honor was pleading. "You know you're as keen on it as I am!"

And yet he had been tremendously alive on Gallipoli.

Curious how one could look back over life and distinguish three periods of high-powered living: when one was fighting, when one was creating, and when one was loving. And the last the vividest of the three!

"Well, what's the decision?" asked Honor.

Oh, she thought he was contemplating a holiday in the Norwegian fjords. He made a humorous grimace for her amusement, and contemplated it.

"Right-ho, my dear. We'll go."

The debate in his head had not been long. Pity had touched Conscience on the elbow, and Conscience had stood upright and bidden him give Honor all he could. And now that Conscience had sat down, some less altruistic debaters were saying a few words in support of his decision. You would have to go somewhere for a holiday, said one, and this trip will take only three weeks instead of five; you will be able to come back quickly to Mary——

"Tony, do you mean it? You don't! You can't!"

"I do. Fix it up with Peggy."—It will be a placid holiday, said another, in which you can dream all day on the ship's rail while romantic scenery gives poignance to your dream, and no one remarks your quietness.

"Oh, Tony, how absolutely gorgeous!"

He smiled at her excitement like a tolerant father.—It will be nice to have Peggy there, said a third, even though it means Michael Saffery too. Who knows: one might, under the stars, tell Peggy all about it. She would be sympathetic as no one else. O Heaven, what a relief it would be!

And Honor jumped up and did what she had not done for many a year: she flung her arms around him and kissed his forehead. He patted her back, while a shudder passed through him. Then he kissed her contritely. And at the same moment the loathliest debater of all spoke: "Three weeks' absence from Mary will leave her pining and unhappy, and she will learn what her need of you is. This will deepen her love."

"But, Honor, you must keep Father Michael all to yourself—

'I do not love old Michael well,
The reason why I cannot tell'—

and certainly he loves me not, though he can be soapy enough at times."

"That'll be all right, Tony. I'll take the Father, and you can find a daughter to flirt with. There are sure to be a lot of pretty young things on board, and you like them young."

And Honor had slipped away, to write at once to Peggy.

Yes, Michael Saffery was a flaw. Lighting an after-breakfast pipe, Tony reviewed the hidden hostility that always played between Father Michael and him. In what had this singular growth germinated? Michael had deceived Peggy, of course, but not deliberately; he had deceived her with his long black cassock, his ascetic face and his earnest sermons; and Peggy had not learned till she married him that, inside this really magnificent character-study of a High Church priest, there lived a lazy, drifting and defeated man. A man who was intellectually insolvent and spiritually insolvent, and knew it and made the best of it; escaping into cheap novels and sensual imaginings. But he had really loved Peggy when he married her; and doubtless he had made a resolution to be better and more worthy of her; but had had no strength to continue the fight. "Worthy of her!" Would *he*, if ever he married Mary, backslide like this and fail her? Oh, no; he would be different from other men. . . . Wait: a comforting thought: Michael had been more than twenty years older than Peggy when he married her; and no one had thought it remarkable.

But let's get back to the hostility. Then Michael had quickly guessed that his young brother-in-law was seeing through his black cassock to the decay inside; and he had probably suspected that Peggy confided in her favourite brother; and so the veiled hostility had begun. One knew so well that at Diocesan Conferences Father Michael, of Southend, would shake hands with Alderman Scrase, of Thamesmouth, and join him in condemning "young brother-in-law's" latest absurdity. "Young Antony seems to think that he's the only parson who went to the war and thought about it. I was at the war too, but I don't make a song about it. Why can't he stick to his job as a priest instead of writing those cheap books?" Oh, Michael was priestly and orthodox enough: he would battle for his High Church faith with all the hot enthusiasm of one who believed none of it. Very jealous of his young brother-in-law's success—that was the plain truth of the matter. Oh, he was a poor creature, and his hostility was an ill-favoured growth. One much preferred

the hostility of Alderman Scrase, which sprang from a soil one could honour.

By the evening of that day Honor, restless with delight, had booked a cabin for her husband and herself on the good ship *Sagaman*; and it was the next afternoon that Mr. Ronald B. Leith, Mary's father, came out from that retired place where most fathers rest and began to build up calamity.

Mr. Leith was a tall, square-shouldered, well-fleshed man, with that young, boyish face which seems to bloom everywhere on the American continent. Looking at the round, fair face, one tried to imagine Mary's mother, from whom she must have drawn her dark oval beauty. It was a good-tempered face, on the whole, though self-assertiveness lingered in the down-drooping corners of the mouth. There was something of self-assertiveness about his grey clothes also: they were too strongly tailored; the shoulders too square and taut; the shirt too patterned; the lapels too smooth and ironed; the trousers too full and much too perfectly valeted. His brown hair was cropped close, up to a line above the ears, after which it was allowed a disciplined development; and the effect of this firm demarcation between the lower and the upper hair was as if he wore a new-fashioned tonsure, which was a ribbon circumscribing the hair instead of a disk in its centre. As for his brown shoes, they shone with the light of the new world.

Mr. Leith liked Mary's friend: "this parson-author of yours, Mary, my girl." He would declare that O'Grogan was a decent sort of guy, with more intelligence than most parsons and twice as much humour (for Mr. Leith conceived himself an expert in the practice and appreciation of humour). He would say, "Bring him along when you've done with him, Mary. I like his talk. He is one who seems able to talk, like me, on most subjects under the sun; but see here, don't you go getting a 'pash' for him. No poppycock like that." Few things disturbed Tony more than the unsuspecting thanks which Mr. Leith would offer him for his kindness to Mary: "I think it extraordinarily kind of you to waste your time bear-leading this cub of mine. Yes, I'll say so. I don't know what she's done to deserve such interest, except to drive you all over New York one day, in my car, and with my gasolene."

"Petrol, dear," Mary would correct him. "'Petrol' in this country. Try and speak English."

A solicitor of Montreal who had "made his pile" and retired, Mr. Leith, having little else to interest him, was now an ardent politician; and he was always eager to expound to Tony his schemes for saving "the old country," cementing the Empire, and protecting Canada from Americanization. While he expatiated on minerals and oil, wheat pools and tariffs, Mary sat near by, not hearing a word, but either fixing her eyes on Tony's profile or letting them stray down the corridor of the hotel. Seldom had Tony produced anything quite so effortful as his replies to Mr. Leith's contentions; and yet his brain served him well, tossing up now a provocative, now a witty contribution to the tedious argument, while his thoughts sat with Mary in her chair. Surely this excellent Mr. Leith must sooner or later perceive his preoccupation and wonder at it; but no, Tony's brain kept his shop-window piled high with social and political goods, so that no one could see that love sat brooding in the parlour behind. The argument bristled on; and at last Mary drifted sadly away up the stairs of the hotel, while Tony, watching her furtively, obeyed his conscience and continued to discuss with Mr. Leith the religious issue in the Province of Quebec. Rather than offend Mr. Leith he continued it for half an hour before escaping in search of Mary.

And now, it being the day after the arrival of Peggy's letter, Tony was drinking tea with father and daughter in the Palm Court of the Ritz. He was often to see that Palm Court in after years (though he would avoid it if possible or pass it quickly), and to remember how Mr. Leith and Mary and he had sat round the table opposite the fountain, in the chairs of green brocade, and he had dropped the Norwegian folder into the talk. There were no others taking tea in the Palm Court, that hot July day. The palms strained upwards to the glass roof, the mirrors doubled them, the marble columns supported a proscenium arch like a theatre's; an orchestra in the corridor immediately below purveyed their sensuous airs; and all to emphasize, and do justice to, Mr. Leith, Mary Leith and Tony. Mr. Leith was in a square grey suit, as smooth as the irons of the Ritz would make it; and he seemed to fit in this marble setting very well. Mary was in a jumper suit of primrose silk, a small tight hat of primrose straw under which the black hair peeped, stockings of flesh silk and brown summer sandals. A necklace of graduated pearls rested on her open throat;

and there could be no denying, this afternoon, that she was able to fit the marble pillars as well as the trees. Tony was in a smart brown suit and neat brown shoes, and may have looked to the gentlemen of the orchestra (not that they showed the smallest interest in him or in humanity at all) perfectly in place, but, as a matter of fact, he was feeling in complete unrelation to these hard, indifferent halls, much as he always felt when paired with a fashionable lady, of porcelain cheeks and scarlet lips, who got the glitter out of life and missed everything else. It was to fill a lacuna in the conversation that he mentioned the *Sagaman* and its forthcoming visit to the Norwegian fjords.

Mr. Leith listened to him for five minutes; then slapped a knee triumphantly and announced: "What a splendid idea! . . . Mary, do you think they'd put up with us too? Ask your long-suffering friend whether he and his wife would tolerate a child like you for a fortnight. To say nothing of the old man."

Mary turned very white.

"Oh, no, Daddy. I—I don't want to go to Norway."

"But you'll just love it. You'll get a real kick out of it. Gee, that's fine! I'd been wondering what we'd do next. London'll be just impossible in August; and I'm getting sick to death of this pub. Will you and your wife mind if we steal your idea and come on the same boat? It'll be nice for Mary if she knows someone among the passengers."

"We should be delighted, I'm sure," said Tony. What else could he say?

"Well, that's fine! Mary, we'll 'phone 'em up right now and see if we can get reservations."

"Oh, Daddy," besought Mary. "Please . . . I don't want to leave London. I've been so happy here."

But Mr. Leith, coming from the American continent, was a man of character and knew it. He was quick in decision, and, having decided, he did not turn back, but got things done.

"Poppycock, child! You'll be still happier there. There's nothing quite like a sight-seeing cruise on a ship: no worries; no trains; darned good food; dancing every night—gee, it's a great notion you've given us, O'Grogan. Is it just you and your good lady that are going, or are you a party?"

"My sister and her husband are coming too."

"They'd rather be alone, Daddy," Mary suggested.

"Well, that's for him to say. Would you, sir? Would you rather keep it a family affair?"

"Not at all," stuttered Tony.

"No. I didn't believe it. . . . Besides, Mary, there'll be the whole darn ship; we can leave 'em alone sometimes. You'll find some young lad to flirt with, no doubt. . . . What sort of fellow's the husband, sir?"

"Another parson; but a good deal older."

"We shall be in holy company, Mary. Is he a broad-minded fellow like you?"

"I don't know about that. He's a very High Churchman."

"Ah, well, I like them. They're the lively lads who tell the Bishops where to get off—aren't they? They've generally got plenty of humour and good sense. Personally, I always get on very well with parsons. Any kids?"

"No. My sister's got a boy of fourteen, but he's going off on his own with some schoolfellows."

"Well, that's fine! Though, perhaps he'd have done for Mary here—two children together—ha, ha! What's the father's name?"

"'Father Saffery' he's always called, or 'Father Michael.' But actually he inherited his father's title some years ago."

"Did he?" Mr. Leith was impressed. "What is he, then? A real, live duke?"

"No; merely a baronet."

"Is he? Sir Something Saffery? So your sister's Lady Saffery?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's fine! They ought to be interesting people to meet. And then there's your wife. Yes, I shall like to meet your wife."

Mary at this point got up and went away. Tony's eyes, following her, saw that her face was grey with sickness.

Only when he sat in his train, returning to Thamesmouth, was he able to think clearly. Then he looked straight at this cloud which had come down upon them, quickly as a summer storm. Heavens! they must run different ways and shelter from it. Mary three weeks in the same narrow ship with him and his wife! At the same table day after day! On the same trips ashore. Honor, unsuspecting, giving her friendship to Mary! Mary, guilty, playing the hypocrite's rôle!

But now the cloud opened at a few points, and let tempting

lights come through. Mary very close to him for three weeks, even though suffering. . . . Mary with him all his holiday instead of absent . . . he snatching her for a few rapturous hours when no one was by . . . ay, and she—here spoke the loathly debater again—she seeing him with other women and wanting him more. She seeing him with Honor, if it came to that! Why, three weeks of such pains and jealousies, and her love would be engraved deeper and deeper, never to be erased by time.

Which was what he wanted. Which was what he knew he must have. He knew that his want would prove stronger than his mercy. He knew, as the train rolled on, that he would put up no fight against the shaping events. And he alone could change their direction. Mary could not defeat her father. She might feign a sickness, but one could hear Mr. Leith banking that sickness to his own account: "Seedy? Nonsense, child. Why, then, a sea-voyage is the very thing for you. You'll be tickled to death with the mountains and the peasants' costumes and the midnight sun, and the whole darned outfit, once you've started." No, he alone could protect her, by withdrawing his party from the *Sagaman*. And he knew that he wouldn't do it, however much he might wish to. How could he turn away from three weeks' sojourning with Mary, when they might have so little time together. How could he deny himself this chance of fixing her love? After all, would it be so wrong? What was the difference between loving Mary in the same country as Honor, and in the same narrow ship? It was mere casuistry to pretend a difference. One must not be conscience's slave. One must know what one wanted and bid boldly for it.

Three weeks with Mary by him! When he got out of the train, his throat was alight—athirst for the *Sagaman's* decks.

CHAPTER III

ONE SPIT DOWN

TWO days later he was in a train that steamed from Hazebrouck to Ypres. It was as crowded as any of the trains that had hurried reinforcements to the battles of September–October, '17; but its travellers were not soldiers to-day. Or if they were soldiers, they travelled in civilian suits with their uniforms folded in their brown leather cases. And they were men of importance, most in that train; men of wealth and age; not the ex-schoolboys herded for slaughter. Never had Tony kept such company in a train. Picking his way along the corridor, he was halted by a voice which, in easy prattle, dropped such tremendous sentences as "I said to Von Kluck in 1911" and "I put it to Kitchener early in '16." He looked through the window into a compartment where every seat was filled and half the floor, and stared at the speaker. He could not identify him, but he recognized the Minister of War sitting opposite him, and a most illustrious Merchant Prince at his side. Prince? Nay, this man, with his finger in every quarter of the globe, was an Emperor; and he sat there in an old black coat and a billycock hat. Huddled into a corner, and listening respectfully rather than speaking, was an Army Commander whose approach, ten years ago, would have fluttered terror in the hearts of brigadiers, colonels, and adjutants—not to speak of the smaller men. A great Bishop sat, deferential and benevolent, in another corner. An Under-Secretary, standing against the door, sustained his shaky position by a grip on the luggage rack; which prompted the Bishop to intrude the facetious but gentle witticism that, for the present, an Under-Secretary was without a seat. In a further compartment Tony recognized the high officials of the British Legion; and one of them informed him that Field-Marshal Lord Plumer himself

was on the train. In the compartment beyond he saw a British Ambassador; and he retreated at once. There was no hope of finding a seat while Ministers hung on to the luggage rack, so he sat himself on his suit-case in the corridor. The man on the next bag stared out of the window at the Flemish fields and poured his reminiscences over anyone who would listen. He was of the loquacious unimagined pattern who never stopped to consider that, in all probability, both the man on the right and the man on the left had visited the war too, and thought their experiences quite as notable as his own.

All were travelling to the Dedication of the Menin Arch. Yesterday *The Daily Sun*, the paper which had presented Antony O'Grogan to the world—Mr. Charles Arthur Hope pronouncing the few biographical and adulatory words—had invited him by 'phone and by wire to attend the great ceremony as its Special Correspondent; and Tony had been quite unable to refuse their offer of all expenses, a large fee, and an aide-de-camp who would go before him to Ypres, secure him a room there, where else no rooms could be got, meet him at the station, instruct him in its duties, and generally look after his comfort. And the idea had not been absent from his mind that he would like Mary to see all his greatness in the columns of *The Daily Sun*. He would spread before her there—or they would spread for him—a fine peacock's tail.

It was a wistful, rather poignant, business to look out at the familiar sites, and see the light of Mary behind them all: the quaint streets of Poperinghe; the straight road from Poperinghe to Ypres; the red houses of Vlamertinghe; and the meadow where Padre Quickshaw had held his service before the battalion went forward to Railway Wood. All that was ten years ago, and Mary was only eleven then; a pig-tailed child at her school in New York; and he was a veteran of the regiment, wondering if he could give up his life to service after the war, and ah! thinking all the time of Honor. Pitiful old years before he had known Mary—

He looked at her as a lover can,
She looked at him as one who awakes,
The Past was a sleep, and Life began.

Ypres. Fancy the train running right into Ypres, with never a thought for the ranging guns! And in the full daylight of afternoon! He struggled from his coach, and had barely

time to observe the broad space before Skindles' Restaurant, the white, new buildings, the flags in the windows, the lively crowds and the standing cars, before Mr. Charles Arthur Hope filled the whole of the foreground. Young Mr. Charles Arthur Hope, in what could only be styled a red suit of plus-fours, with plaid stockings and tassels ablow; and the city of Ypres for his background. Mr. Charles Arthur Hope, trying to look like the Squire's younger son, and not succeeding. Looking instead exactly what he was: a pushing little pressman who was getting rather fat.

"Come along, Mr. O'Grogan," instructed Mr. Hope. "You didn't expect to see me, did you? When I heard that they were getting you to write up this show to-morrow, I told them that I was their man to go and look after you, seeing as I knew you personally. You remember me? It was I that put you over."

"I am hardly likely to forget the shock you gave me the next morning."

"Oh, that was nothing," said Mr. Hope.

"But it *was* something," protested Tony, though with a smile—so long ago, and so far behind Mary, seemed that old resentment. "I told you there was to be no story."

"Oh, that was nothing. It went over big." And Mr. Hope left the subject. "Look here: you know what I'm here for——"

"You're not here to write me up, I hope?"

"Not at all. . . . At least, the idea hadn't occurred to me. I dare say we might make a little copy out of you if we run short——"

"Please don't."

"Oh, you mustn't be so press-shy, now that you're a big man. No, I'm here to give you all the help I can in writing up this story. You haven't done much journalism, have you?"

"None at all."

"Well, command me. I'll do anything for you. I'll write your story, if you like; I expect it's only your name we want—really. I've got you a room. I don't mind telling you I've had a job to get it. I had to bribe the landlord to sack someone else and give it to you. And the other bloke had paid a deposit too! They're low-down dogs, these Flamingoes; you can always buy them if you pay their price. It's not the Ritz, you know, but it's clean."

"That'll be all right," assured Tony, though unhappy about the lessee supplanted.

"Well, will you come and see it now, and park your doings, and then come and have a cup of tea at Skindles' ? The other boys are there."

"I'll come and see it now, but I don't want any tea. I want to wander out into the country and look for one or two places."

"Oh, you were here in the war, were you ?"

"Yes, I was here."

"Oh, well, that's magnificent. You must work all that into your story. Come on then ; it's only just round the corner, at the 'Pigeon Blank.'"

He led Tony into a small tavern, "*Au Pigeon Blanc*," and presented him to the fattest host man ever beheld. He raised his voice at this smiling fat man and translated his English into simple Chinese, since the poor fellow was a foreigner.

"Here's the gentleman, Mossoo ; and you look after him velly well—see ? He big man. Big Writer. Want everything of the best. Get me ? One day you tell people he stay here and sleep in your first-floor-front. You put up brass plate there. Great man. Books, you know."

Mine host could hardly bow and rub his hands, because of the immense protuberance of his stomach ; but he smiled the more, and prayed them mount the stairs. Heaving his great weight before them, he threw open the door of a room on the first floor. Tony, entering, found himself in a very clean little bedchamber, with floor new-scrubbed, iron bed, crucifix and holy-water stoup, a lithograph of the Blessed Virgin, and a photograph of the King of the Belgians. He dumped his bag and his raincoat.

"Now he leave you," shouted Mr. Charles Arthur Hope to the landlord, pointing at Tony. "He in war. Fight Bosche. Give him what-ho, and get plenty medals—see ? You were wounded, weren't you, Mr. O'Grogan ?"

"Yes."

"He wounded. Velly badly wounded. Nearly died. Here was it, Mr. O'Grogan ?"

"Yes."

"He wounded at Ypres, fighting like hell. Not above a hundred yards from your door. So you look after him well. Now he going to write it all up for English papers. The ceremony, I mean. To-morrow morning. Arch. You not

look after him well, he say so in English papers, and no one come to your pub. Bad show for you—what? You make him velly comfortable, he tell the world, and crowds come to stay here”—Mr. Hope spread his arms to demonstrate the width of the multitude that would come knocking for hospitality at this door—“and they pay through the nose—pay big—see?”

The host smiled his felicitations and his assurances at the great writer, the great fighter, the great publicity agent.

“Well now, he’ll probably want a rinse,” continued Mr. Hope, forgetting to speak Chinese. “Get him some water and soap. We use much soap in England. I’ll breeze off now, Mr. O’Grogan. You’ll find me at Skindles’. Come back in time for dinner, which is at seven o’clock. You’ll see the other boys then.”

Tony did not delay for his rinse. He hurried out into the street. This city around him seemed to have a force of its own which was driving him away from its houses and out to the fields, to find, if possible, Railway Wood and the trench near the Steenbeek river, and the captured German line from which he had sallied to the assault of the pill-box. His steps were rapid over pavement and cobbles. Surely he was walking through the newest city in the world! Never a city before of which every brick was white from the kiln and every stone smooth from the mason’s yard. The new houses, with their antique crow-step gables, seemed—as indeed they were—the reproductions, in an exhibition, of ancient Flemish models. In the Grande Place the ruins of the Cloth Hall were swept white and clean, and preserved by white pointing from further decay. Behind these jagged colonnades the tower of the Cathedral was rising, white and chalky, within its cage of scaffolding.

This city glistening in the sun—was it old Wipers that, when last he saw it, was a waste land of rubble and ruin, its water-logged hollows reflecting the night? Nothing was whole in it then except the road—the pallid procession of cobbles that led to the Menin Gate. Here this afternoon were needlework shops and tailors’ shops, cafés and restaurants. Charabancs backed against the Cloth Hall, waiting to take sightseers on a tour of the battlefields. A sign-post clamoured for visitors to the “Panorama,” near the Menin Arch. Thousands of happy, excited people, though mostly in black, moved this way and

that: women in shawls and *en cheveux*, men in frock-coats and straw hats, children in Sunday suits and socks, here a priest with a broad-brimmed hat, and there a Belgian soldier with a tassel to his cap. And shop after shop had thrown open its doors, and turned its loud-speaker towards the people in the street, so that, at every twenty paces, the same dance music blared into their ears.

Only the cobbles were the same; and Tony looked at them, thinking of all that they knew. How many thousands had tramped over them, glancing left and right at the last city of this world that they would see. There were barriers along the cobbles now, ready to hold back the crowds who to-morrow would watch a pilgrimage of English women to the Menin Arch. Those women might march and march for days and for weeks, but they would never equal the numbers of their men who had tramped the same stones before them.

Ypres was ready for the pilgrims: from every sill she hung Belgian tricolours and Union Jacks; from every carnival pole and lamp standard she hung an amplifier that a multitude in the Grande Place and the side streets might hear the speeches and music at the Menin Arch; in every window she displayed picture postcards of "Ypres in 1915," picture postcards of the battle, albums of *cartes vues choisies*, souvenirs beaten from shell-case brass. Ypres was proud of her late agony, and would exploit its cash-value to the full. And why not? Why should it offend one? It was thrifty and sensible.

He turned left from the Grande Place, and there, before his eyes, was the great white Arch. "Erected to the memory of 60,000 men of the British Armies who perished in the Ypres Salient and whose bodies have no known grave." He called up imagination to aid him, but it lingered, unhelpful; and he was beneath the great span without having thought much. It was like standing in a basilica's nave. The sunlight slanted in from the west; the air was cold after the dazzling street; and the voice of another roof-gazer went echoing about the galleries. Sixty thousand names cut on walls and stairways and galleries. That was all that was left of them. Names. Not a body; not a grave. Not for them to live, and to leave the war behind them, and somewhere in the after years to find a Mary.

The great Arch satisfied him. There were those of his artist friends who affected to despise it, but it seemed to him worthy of its purpose. It arched over the story.

He rambled onward to Hell-Fire Corner, and still he could not think much. This level-crossing with its gates and sign-posts, and its houses all about it, could it be Hell-Fire Corner? It should not be difficult to branch off to Railway Wood from here; he had but to follow the railway track for a few hundred yards, and then a low green hummock on his right, where the railway neared the Cambridge Road, would be the roof of Railway Wood. He climbed over a fence and stepped along the sleepers. Open country was around him now, a pleasant landscape of green fields dotted with bright new red roofs and spangled with the light of windows that caught the western sun. No need to duck or crouch this evening. There was not a hint of the battle anywhere, except the youth of the poplars. That, and the fences made by a thrifty people out of the old corkscrew stakes, and with the telephone wire along which had run the order to die, and the barbed wire on which men had torn their bodies obeying the order. Here and there a section of a Nissen hut was being used as a shed for the tools of peace, or as a covering over the hay.

Not a soul in sight. The black-coated crowds preferred the city streets; they did not know what to look for here.

See, though! There were a few wanderers in the distant fields. Were they some of the English visitors searching like him?

This green crown, with the tiny shack on top and a bicycle standing at its door, must be Railway Wood. Once it had been a clump of woodland, but the guns had altered all that, and made it into a grassy rise very suitable for a peasant's cot. Heavens! did the family within know that, fifteen feet under their earth, thousands of British soldiers had lived in mine galleries, waiting their orders to go out along the duck-boards to their share of the battle; that, down there, Kit Scrase had come home with his wounded hand and such thoughts as only God could know. Here where the cart tilted on to its shafts the battery had stood, and Tony had seen a gun-team blown to dust. Thud, thud, on this crown the gas shells had plumped, and at once the blanket curtains had gone down over the entrances to Railway Wood Dug-outs. Where were those steep shafts now, with their wooden stairs? All fallen in and silted up. That scar in the slope, a-shimmer with grass, might be the doorway where he had stood to watch the night-raid over Ypres.

He strolled to the top of the crown, where in old days one had hardly dared to stand. He wanted to look over the undulating salient towards the Passchendaele ridge.

But when he stood there his eyes were captured by something more immediate than the far-off roofs of Passchendaele. Down below the hump a man and woman were standing, with their backs turned to him, while the man's arm pointed towards Hooze, Hill 60, and Gheluvelt. On soft feet Tony went down to them, and heard the man's voice: "Gas! Law! It was gas shells all day. I always reckon it was jest abaht here I got me bit of gas. I come up one day to see what Jerry was up to, and crikey!"—his hand rose to cover his mouth—"I knew what it was before I was aht of the door! Swiff! Pooff! Plunk! Gas shells by the thahsand. Mug's game it was to come up at all. I'd only meself to thank for *my* bit of gas, and I've never said anything else."

"When was this, Joe?" asked Tony.

Joe Wylie swung about, put his hands on his hips, and sprung a blasphemy. He was in his bowler hat and his best Sunday black; and his medals caught the light as he swung round. Tib was also in gallant mourning.

"Well, nah! You made me jump, sir, like one of them five-nines going off six paces to the rear. My heart's still at it. Not but what we expected to see you. We sor in the papers that you was comin', and I said to Tib, 'We shall meet him there, like as not.'"

"Well, we couldn't want a better place to meet."

"You're right there, sir! Crikey, it's comic, isn't it?—standin' together again on this little ole spot?"

"How did you get here?"

"'Ow? I said to the missus, when I sor in the papers that they were going to unveil this 'ere arch, I said, 'We're goin', if we never 'ave another 'ape'ny to spend!' I said, 'We're goin', if we 'ave to walk 'all the way!' But it turned aht to be quite easy: cheap tickets, free passports and all."

"But where are you sleeping to-night?"

"Ah, that's where I had something like a brain-storm, sir. We nipped off the train at Pop, and knocked at all the doors till we fahnd a room. And to-morrow, if we can't get into Ee-prez no other way, we're goin' to foot-slog it all the way from Pop. I'd like to march Tib along that road. I'm goin' to fall her in abaht six o'clock, cover her off, examine her

equipment, and take her name and number if necessary; and then, when I've got her properly fell in, we'll by-the-right-quick-march. And if you arst me"—he winked slyly—"there'll be some lorry-jumping to-morrow mornin', on the other side of Vlamertinghe. Did-jer see old Vlamertinghe from the train, sir?"

"Rather, Joe!"

"We come past it in a kind of lorry jest nah, sir. Gaw! it do make you think a bit to see it all inhabited. I recognized the house where we halted that day when Fred Roberts was for going on strike. At least I think I did. There's another thing, sir." Joe began to look rather arch. "Tib and I was wonderin' whether you—we was wonderin', like—oh, *you* tell 'im, Tib."

Tib adjusted her hat and her hair with a view to tackling this job in a workmanlike manner. "We was wonderin', sir, whether you, being one of the star-turns—if you take my meaning—whether you could get us a decent place at to-morrer's show. Of course I know I'm not a mother or a widder——"

"Never 'ad no such luck," interrupted Joe.

"Oh, ain't he awful, sir? . . . And the mothers and widders, I mean, must have the best places—that I shall *always* say; I'll stand back for them every day of the week. O'course! But if you *could* manage, sir——"

"I'll do what I can, Mrs. Wylie."

"Thank you, sir," said Tib, and began to plume the laces at her bosom so as to be worthy of an honourable place at the ceremony.

"And now, sir," resumed Joe, "I want you to tell her all abaht it. All abaht what it was like, this 'ere." He waved his arm over a segment of the salient, from Passchendaele to Hill 60. "You'll do it better than I can; and she'll believe you, what's more. She don't believe me, I've told her so many lies in my life. And I don't blame her. But you couldn't lie about this 'ere, could yer, sir?"

"Hardly."

"No, that's what I told 'er. I told her what Fred Roberts used to say, that it was like the ole Sinai Desert, only mud and water instead of sand: you looked to the north and there was damn-all there; you looked to the sahth, and there was damn-all there; you looked to the east and there was damn-all there; you looked to the west and there was damn-all there; in fact, beggar-all everywhere!" And since "beggar-all" was

not the exact word that Fred Roberts had used, Joe looked supremely wicked over his long forefinger.

"But what about the duck-boards, Joe?"

"Lord, yes! I'd forgotten the duck-boards. The duck-boards went cruisin' over the mud and the shell-'oles; and there was nothin' else to be seen anywhere. And look at it now! . . . Lummy, I could stand 'ere for ever!"

"And there was a kind of ribbon of fire round it all night——"

"Thet's right! You listen, Tib!"

"It was the Véry lights and the flares, and the flashing of the German guns——"

"A blinkin' firework show. Pain's best; every night for nothin'."

"And the water in the shell-holes and the lagoons would reflect the fireworks. Then there was the everlasting throbbing of the guns; and the smell—of—of which the less said the better."

"D'y'ear that, Tib? And I was tellin' her, sir, that it was fifteen feet below where we stand that her lovin' 'usband lived and cooked 'is bit o' dinner. Is that right, sir?"

"Perfectly right."

"And it was dahn there that Captain Scrase—Gawd! what he must 'a' suffered fifteen feet under the soles of your shoes, Tib! When I was at Pop jest now, I mentioned going out to Proven to see 'is grave; and I felt glad, then, that I'd never told that old bleeder, 'is father—though he did give me four months! Have you ever thought, sir, that Captain Scrase never knew what the end of the war was? That none of 'em knew?"

"Yes, I sometimes think of it. I was thinking of it under the Arch."

"Oh, and isn't it a loverly arch?" said Tib. "I should think the mothers'll be prahd to-morrer. I 'ope they will, I *must* say—for *their* sakes. . . . Yuss."

"Have you traced any of the entrance-shafts, Joe?" asked Tony.

"Yes, sir. You come 'ere, sir." He led Tony and Tib round to the southern flank of the hummock, where a small landslide had undoubtedly occurred, though grass and weeds had long ago mantled the wound. "Now that, I reckon, sir, is where I stood by the door on that mornin' when you and the battalion went up to the Line for our first show. The duck-boards ran along here. It was abaht four o'clock, I think."

Mr. Hughes Anson was one of the first back, somewhere abaht three pip-emma; and I arst 'im how the battalion had got on. And he said, 'Not too brightly, Joe. Abaht half of 'em's dead.' And I said, 'And C Company, sir, how 'ave they fared?' and he only made a grimace. I 'ardly liked to arst about you, sir—not that I minded whether you was killed or not, mind you——”

Joe's finger covered this jest, and Tib said, “Law, Joe! Ain't you awful?”

——“but because I was afraid of losin' a good job and bein' sent back to the platoon. So I said, 'Mr. Aylwin all right, sir?' And he said, 'Done in.' So I said, 'Mr. Wimborne?' And he said, 'Done in.' And then I said, 'Has my boss come through all right?' And he said, 'Your boss! Lawd-a-mighty, he's won the bloomin' war. He's taken a pill-box all by hisself, and blown all its occupants sky-high, and now he's sittin' in it, feelin' sick. He'll get a ruddy V.C. And Padre Quickshaw,' he says, 'he's led a bloomin' counter-attack, and won the war too. He'll get a V.C. too, or a court-martial, being as how he's a parson.' Oh, he was one of the best, Mr. Hughes Anson. I remember that last morning, when the battalion went up for the last time, and never come back, most of 'em. I was standin' at the same spot, Tib, and Captain O'Grogan was standin' just about where he is now, with 'is arm all bandaged up—and what was left of the battalion filed past us along the duck-boards—jest 'ere, I reckon. Mr. Hughes Anson and A Company came first, and as he passed Captain O'Grogan, he said, 'So long, Bungay!'—beggin' your pardon, sir—'So long,' he said, 'you can sell all my kit for the benefit of the mess'; and when he passed me, he said, 'Hello, Joe, you ole scrimshanker. Why aren't you coming along of us?' And I said, 'Because I made a Separate Peace last night, sir.' And he said, 'Well, goo'bye, Joe. It's a good war.' And I said, 'Never a better, sir; never a better;' though I was feelin' a bit dahn, to tell the truth. I was afraid he wouldn't come back, somehow.” Joe stopped and sent his eyes away over the fields. “And to think that he's out there now, somewhere!”

Tib wiped her eyes, and put a term to her husband's soliloquy. “Come on, Joe. You're keepin' Mr. O'Grogan. I expect he's got something better to do than listen to you.”

“Oh, no,” Tony demurred. “I'm going forward over the fields to see what I can find. Come too, if you like.”

"No, thank you, sir," said Joe. "I'm goin' back by the Potijze Road, so as to show Tib where the Dressin' Station was. Funny, ain't it, how *you're* interested in the front parts of the Line, and I'm interested in the back parts? Shows what a hero I musta bin."

On this jest they parted. Tony, rambling on, was soon lost in plough-land and pasture. He had no faith that his sense of direction was serving him well, for he had never seen this ground in the daylight. And its fresh green lap was the very antithesis of that old dark moonlit swamp. But suddenly a puff of wind brought a reek to his nostrils, and with it the picture came: the ringed water in the shell-holes, and the long melancholy tarns reflecting the sky, and never anywhere a sign of life, but, all around, an horizon just luminous with morning. . . . The picture faded. . . . Some small creature must be rotting in the Steenbeek ditch or under the long wheat.

Curious how this perky green country, now about him again, seemed to lack the dignity of that terrible landscape. This sun-flushed lift of the ground, could it have been the First Objective?—yesterday the brink of life and time, now a rise in a field. If so, the pill-box lay but a few score yards behind. But what yards! He climbed the ridge and looked about him. In the tall wheat there certainly were some tumbled chunks of concrete. But these ruined pill-boxes were everywhere in the Flanders arable, and he could not know that this one was his. However, he would go across to it and imagine it was. If these were the same few yards, how he had run them last time, and with what wild eyes, what a palpitant heart! He stood in the waist-high wheat and stared at the ruined concrete. Say it was the pill-box, then on this spot he had closed for ever the lives of four or five men. Had they been young men, or old? He had not had time to see. Perhaps they were young and, but for him, would have lived, and gone home, and found their German Marys. Perhaps some of their remains were in the soil under his feet.

He tried to think, to imagine, to feel; but it was difficult.

Sauntering back towards Ypres, he drew near a young peasant who was digging his patch in the evening light. By his side was a bucket, and every now and then he stooped, picked up something, and tossed it into the bucket, where it fell with a metallic clink. Tony halted to ascertain what his finds might

be. He saw that the young man was digging and turning over the earth to the depth of two spits. The first spit, when his spade lifted it, was usually empty of spoil, but there was never a second, lower spit that did not yield its red-rusted cartridge clip, or its shrapnel bullets; its nose-cap or its shell splinter. Whenever he found a regimental badge he put it into his pocket; if German into a left pocket; if British into a right. He could sell them to the bazaar over yonder at Hill 60.

Of all this evening's sights this saddened Tony the most. But why? Why should it sadden him to think that ten years had passed and the war was already one spit down?

CHAPTER IV

SKINDLES'

IT was long past seven o'clock, and he was a late-comer when he entered the large *salle à manger* of Skindles'. His opening of the door was like the turning of a wireless control: it amplified for him a din of chattering voices, clinking cutlery, and clashing plates. Every table that he could see had its fill of guests, and the bustling waitresses were hard pressed to minister to all their needs. A most distinguished company the room presented: the great men from the train were there, and their great ladies; the Bishop, the Ambassador, the Merchant and the Cabinet Ministers. Most were in the black and white of evening dress, but some Generals and Staff officers added their notes of colour, with their khaki jackets, red tabs and rows of medal ribbons. It was rather like the "Berkeley" in war time.

This company had no terrors for Mr. Charles Arthur Hope, however, who rose from a table at the far end of the room, waved a signal to Tony, and called, "Hi! Hi, Hi!" Tony took a twisting path towards his face, and found him at a table with two other men and two chairs turned down to await their guests. One of these chairs Mr. Hope pushed upright for Tony.

"Thought you were never coming," he said. "Thought you were lost. This is Captain Hastings, who's got his aeroplane here, to take back our photos to-morrow. He's a famous man in his way. Like you. He flew in a Moth to India. I expect you remember."

Tony did not remember, but he said, "Oh, of course," and bowed to Captain Hastings.

"And this is Rowlands, one of our photographers. M'Gunn has still to come. He's out getting photographs and choosing

his sites for to-morrow's show. Here you are, Miss! One of 'em's come. Bring him his soup."

Tony sat down and unfolded his table-napkin.

"Tell me all the arrangements for to-morrow," he begged.

"Well, Captain Hastings here will have his aeroplane in a field near the Arch, and he'll get away with M'Gunn and Rowland's pictures half an hour before the ceremony's over. That's what he's here for. Isn't it, Captain?"

"But what's the idea of that?" asked Tony.

"So as we can beat the *Daily Record*, if possible. We want his pictures in Manchester by the evening, for our early northern editions. And we're going to have an edition on sale in Belgium by six o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Well, tell me what I shall have to do."

"We shall have a car waiting, and shove you into it immediately after the ceremony, and hustle you to Ostend, where we have the rights over a telephone wire for an hour. You'll dictate your story over that."

"Yes, but where shall I write it?"

"God knows. In the car, I suppose."

"I can't do that. In a car bumping over Belgian cobbles! No, thank you! I can only write if I shut myself in a room and walk up and down."

"Well, then, you had better write it to-night; that's all I can say. I mean, you can guess more or less what'll happen."

"No," objected Tony. . . . "I don't think I fancy that."

"The Programme's out," Mr. Hope mumbled into his wine.

Just then a diner in search of a seat came up and asked if he might occupy the chair which Mr. Hope had turned down for M'Gunn.

"No, I'm sorry, old man," apologized Mr. Hope. "But that's reserved for Colonel Anstruther, who's seeing the Burgo-master at present. I'm awfully sorry, old man."

The diner accepted his regrets, and sought accommodation elsewhere.

"Well, about your story," continued Mr. Hope. "In case anything goes wrong with it, Captain Hastings will be taking mine in his aeroplane, along with the pictures——"

"But wait a minute," interrupted Tony; "you said he was leaving before the ceremony ended. When are you going to write yours?"

"Oh, I've written it," assured Mr. Hope, helping himself to cheese.

"Have you?" Tony laughed. "Do read it to me, then. I should like to know what happened."

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Hope, but first he beckoned to the waitress. "Here, miss! Bring him his veal cutlet. He don't deserve it, I know; but he's got to live."

"*Mais oui, monsieur*," responded the waitress; and, nodding and smiling, she hurried into the clatter behind a long glass screen.

Now another diner approached the chair turned down for M'Gunn and was about to take it, when Mr. Hope put out a correcting hand.

"No, no. So sorry, old man. That seat's reserved for Colonel Anstruther, who's with the Burgomaster at present. I can't think what's keeping him. He'll be here any moment. Shockingly sorry, old man."

Touched by this courtesy, the diner assured Mr. Hope of his perfect understanding, and departed.

"Wonderful what a lot of use the Colonel's been," said Mr. Hope. "He's chivvied half a dozen away from that chair already. Him and the Burgomaster make a stout pair. Well, this story—here it is." And he drew from the breast-pocket of his coat a bundle of quarto sheets and their carbon duplicates over which he had sprawled, in a huge careless writing, his description of the Dedication of the Menin Arch. He read it carelessly, while Tony ate a *schnitzel* and salad, and sipped his *vin blanc*. It described, in noble language, the Great March of the Mothers and Widows through silent, sympathetic crowds who stood gazing—and not without reverence—while these tired women passed, who had given their all, for Belgium. It described the arrival of Albert the Good, and the cries of his loyal subjects, "*Vive le Roi!*" "That's what they *do* yell, isn't it, Rowlands?" asked Mr. Hope in parenthesis. It described Field-Marshal Lord Plumer ascending the dais, that fine old veteran of a hundred battles who had kept the gates of Ypres inviolate for so long—what thoughts were his now! "I've left a space here for any good points in his speech," explained Mr. Hope. It described the tense silence of ten thousand people—"No, that won't do: 'tense' and 'ten'"—the profound, rather harrowing silence of ten thousand people, as the flags fell from the inscription over the

Arch, while the stone lion above looked out over the immortal salient, sternly, but not without pride. Then the Last Post ringing through the sunlit noon—"Or 'rainy noon,' as the case may be"—and echoing away over the unknown graves, while hardly an eye in the listening multitude was dry—

"There's M'Gunn!" exclaimed Mr. Hope, clapping his papers on the table and rising to his feet. "There he is! Hi!"

At the door stood a man of fifty in a dusty blue serge suit, with his bowler still on his head and his large press-camera still slung from his shoulder. It seemed to Tony that M'Gunn had been taking, not only photographs, but wine, in the streets of Ypres, for he stared with a sparkling amazement at the gallant company before him, swung his eyes from one red-tabbed general to another as if considering which was the best rose in the garden, blinked his eyes at their total glory, and cried:

"All above the rank of captain, stand at ease!"

After which he removed his hat, disclosing a head of wet, grey hair, and came towards Mr. Hope's table, smiling brightly at everybody, and apologizing handsomely to the ladies for any accident *en route*.

"Here you are, old cock," said Mr. Hope.

"I've bought a café," announced M'Gunn, dumping his camera on the floor. "I've bought a café."

"What for?" Rowlands asked mildly. He was a thin little man, older than his colleagues, and bruised into shyness by their loud vitality.

"To keep out the *Record*," explained M'Gunn. "It's got a lovely slant on the Arch, and I can get pictures from its windows and its roof that'll lick the *Record* into a cocked hat. So I've shut it down for to-morrow. Pretty good, eh? Shut it down for all day, so that the *Record* shan't get in. Don't ask what it cost me." Now he examined Tony.

"And who is this joint?"

"That is our Mr. O'Grogan," said Mr. Hope.

"Pleased to meet you, sir." M'Gunn extended a very dirty hand. "Can't say that I've read any of your books, or that I will, either. But that's neither here nor there. What are they paying you for this?"

Tony stated his fee. M'Gunn exclaimed "Christ!" and sat down.

"It takes me three months to earn that," he continued, "but I don't blame you. What's the good of having a big name if you don't sell it for all that it'll fetch? Come along, miss! Bring the eats. Anything that's going. I don't look as important as these generals, but I'm a hell of a nob really."

"You close down for a shake," commanded Mr. Hope. "I'm just reading to Mr. O'Grogan my description of what happened to-morrow. You get busy with the soup, while I get on with it. There's a rather beautiful bit coming. It's a Mother Story."

Mr. Hope returned to his manuscript and, lolling back in his chair, read its conclusion. This was a moving account of his interview with one of the Mothers, after the ceremony. Only yesterday morning, said this mother, she had found in an attic one of the toys that her Dicky used to play with as a child. It was a toy gun. He had always been fond of soldiers, but in those far-off days she had never foreseen that he would be a soldier himself one day and lay down his life for his country. "I cried a little when I saw his name up there on the Arch," said she, "and I thought of that little gun; but I won't say as I wasn't proud too."

"J'ever hear such tripe?" inquired M'Gunn, lapping up his soup.

"Of course it's tripe," Mr. Hope accepted, "but it's what we want."

"Why?" demanded Tony, rather angrily. "I can understand your inventing stories when you've insufficient copy, but why cook up stuff like that when there'll be more emotion in this town to-morrow than any of us can deal with?"

"Must have a Mother Story," said Mr. Hope cheerfully.

"But why? Why, when the whole darned thing, if it comes to that, is one terrible 'mother story'?"

"Must have something intimate and personal," persisted Mr. Hope. "It's only women who read these illustrated papers, and if we're to catch up the *Record*, which has a million and a half circulation to our million, we must get the women. And it's this mother-sob-stuff that gets 'em."

"I wonder," murmured Tony.

"What sort of billet have you got?" inquired M'Gunn, pushing his soup plate away, and turning round to call to the waitress, "Next, please, miss."

"Not too bad," replied Tony. "A bedroom at the *Pigeon Blanc*."

"Rowlands has done better than that. He's got himself a pukka officer's billet. Sly old devil!"

"What's an officer's billet?" asked Captain Hastings.

"*You* ought to know, dammit. I thought you air-lads were the lads who went the pace. Weren't you in the war?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, you know what an officer's billet is."

"I do not."

"One with a blushin' daughter who'll oblige a gentleman—eh, miss?" M'Gunn winked at the waitress who brought him his fish.

Captain Hastings said nothing. He was a quiet, tolerant fellow, and, like Tony, seemed amused by the company he was keeping. He fingered his glass, smoked his pipe, and listened.

"You'd never think it of old Rowlands, would you?" proceeded M'Gunn. "Not to look at him, you wouldn't. Ah, the old devil! He do behave naughty, don't he, for an old party like him? Oh, go hon!" M'Gunn covered his maidenly modesty with a hand over cheek and eyes. "He's a Goer, he is!"

Rowlands accepted the quizzing with a mild grin.

"There's nothing in my billet that a man would touch with the tongs," deplored M'Gunn. "I think I'll go to Ostend with you, sir, and with Charlie, to-morrow. You've timed your visit well. It's right in the season at Ostend just now."

"What season?" demanded Tony, over the match flame with which he was lighting his pipe.

"The Fruit Season, if you like. The Tart Season."

Mr. Hope tossed a match at him. "Hold your noise, sweetheart. You're tight."

By this time the guests had mostly gone from their tables. Only a few late-comers, like M'Gunn, stayed gobbling the last of their meals. The waitresses, freed from attendance on the guests, were working at a long trestle table, where they sliced ham, cut rolls, and put up the sandwiches in paper-bags. The hotel expected to sell a thousand and more paper-bag lunches to the visitors who would come to-morrow from England, Brussels, Ostend and the watering-places along the Belgian Coast. The emptiness of the room uncovered to Mr. Hope's

view another table where six or seven reporters and photographers of other journals were lingering over their pipes and glasses. He shouted to them to come to his table where he would introduce them to some great men; and they came, bringing smokes, drinks, and a great deal of jocular abuse.

Mr. Hope had now a dozen companions with whom to enjoy the night; and he called for cigars, liqueurs, wine and lager. "Have what you like," said he. "Most of these things are cheap enough in Belgium;" and he chose for himself a large cigar. Tony, though rather liking the fellow, thought he had never seen anyone look quite such a bounder as Mr. Charles Arthur Hope with a long cigar.

For the first hour their talk was "shop." M'Gunn told how he had found a white-haired old Belgian dame with a perfect film-face, and had posed her for a close-up. She would do, he thought, for "Mrs. Simpson of London, who lost all three sons in the Salient." "But I'm not sure," he mused. "She looks as English as you or me, but she would keep smiling." Then he had caught an aeroplane high in the sky, with the Lion sitting on the bottom of the picture; which he designed as a study of "Captain Hastings flying home with the photographs." Bakewell, of *The Onlooker*, claimed to have done better than this: he had induced a Belgian soldier to stand in a field, with his head bowed and his figure silhouetted against the western sky. His head was bare, of course, and his cap hidden from sight. He should do, Mr. Bakewell thought, for "A British Tommy revisiting the scene of his memories."

"Oh, I can make those things better at home," said M'Gunn.

"Yes, but not with the spires of Ypres in the background."

"Can't I?" M'Gunn reassured him.

Then came the bawdy tales. Better and bawdier tales as the drinks released control, and the night wore on. The room was the pressmen's now, and the waitresses'; who continued to carve and slice and spread, while the piles of pilgrims' lunches rose higher and higher. M'Gunn tried to handle each waitress that passed him, but she slapped his fingers away with a laugh. He called out invitations at her retreating face, and slapped the knee which was available for her, when she should be disengaged. He waved kisses to any of her sisters who turned to consider him.

Then he led the company in song. He had a very good voice, which, if a little thick and treacherous at first, recovered its

full tone after a few minutes' exercise. He encouraged its improvement by several *doh-ray-me-fah-sohs* up and down the scale, and some generous clearings of the throat. His choir leaned back in their seats, with their elbows on tables and their feet on other chairs, and followed him in :

"Show me the way to go home,
I'm tired, and I want to go to bed;
I had a little drink about an hour ago
And it went right to my head. . . ."

Their success, and indeed they sang well, inspired him.

"Now we'll have real Community Singing," he announced, and stood up, turned his chair about, and knelt on it to conduct. "Yes, and *without* acknowledgments to the *Express*, which is not represented here, I think." He scrutinized all their faces. "No. Then we didn't learn our Community Singing from the *Daily Express*, did we, boys?"

"No!" they roared.

"Certainly not. Very good, then. We will now show these young ladies what community singing is like in England to-day. I'm a whale of a conductor, I am."

He poised his baton, which was a pipe-stem, and staring at the far-distant wall with an expression as of a musical soul moved beyond bearing by a concord of sweet sounds, led them in :

"Shenandoah, I love your daughter,
Away, you rolling river.
Oh, Shenandoah, I love your daughter,
Away I'm bound to go
'Cross the wide Missouri."

At first the waitresses were too busy to be impressed by this soft-voiced singing. But after M'Gunn had led his choir, all sentimental now, through a very gentle rendering of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," that was like the murmur of darkies singing down the stream at night :

"Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.
I looked over Jordan, and what did I see
Coming for to carry me home——"

they began to gather round and listen; and M'Gunn, much encouraged, exhorted his children to surpass themselves in

the chorus of "All through the night." They had but to sing these words very beautifully, very tenderly, very wistfully, like a lot of soulful tenors in the last stages of consumption, while he sang the verses alone. They did so.

"Deep the silence round us spreading,
All . . . through . . . the night.
 Dark the path that we are treading,
All . . . through . . . the night. . . ."

Ypres was silent round Skindles' now, and the words of the song seemed to enable both singers and listeners to perceive the emptiness and the dark that lay beyond their lighted windows. In Tony the lovely air, though sung by careless men, was piercing almost to the fount of tears. He drew out his pipe, and saw the fields beyond the ramparts lying tranquil under the night sky. Did the Salient look more like itself when night abstracted colour from the grass and from the bright red roofs? Would one find one's way about it better in the dark, and would one's friends seem nearer? Did the darkness give their country back to them, they who were not known of the cornflowers and the wheat and the sun?

Pulling at his pipe, he saw the sun of to-morrow slaying the Salient, and the fragments of a pill-box lying in the wheat like a tumbled cromlech.

"Give us something the ladies can sing too," shouted Mr. Hope.

"The Belgian National Anthem," said someone.

"Don't know it," grumbled another.

"Well, the Marseillaise," suggested Mr. Hope.

"Damn, no! They're probably half Huns," muttered M'Gunn, while the waitresses watched, uncomprehending.

"The Soldiers' Chorus from *Faust*," suggested Captain Hastings.

"That's it!" announced M'Gunn, and poised his baton again: "One—two—three——!"

"Glory and love to the men of old . . ."

and immediately the voices of the waitresses responded to the vigorous appeal of his baton. One of the two waiters who

stood with them, an Italian, mingled his sonorous language with the English and the French :

“ *Dispiega l' ale sul vincitor,
Accendi nei cor, novello valor. . . .* ”

“ *Drunk . . . last night, ditto the night before,
So drunk, I couldn't get through the door——* ”

“ What's that ? ” exclaimed M'Gunn, dropping his baton ; and the chorus stopped abruptly.

In the darkness outside, on the broad *Place* between Skindles' and Ypres Station, an English voice was calling : “ Fall in ! Fall in there ! ” Many boots were treading the cobbles, and the butts of rifles smiting the ground.

The pressmen and the waitresses turned their faces to the sound and listened.

“ Cover off now ! . . . ' *Shun ! Slope h' upp !* ” Rifles slapped into place. “ Form Fours ! Right ! By the right, quick march ! ” There was the tramp of a regiment marching away. “ All right. March at ease. ” The order released many English and Scottish voices, which shouted greetings and banter to—to whom ? To faces, perhaps, that were peering from windows. “ *Bonn joor, mad'moiselle.* ” “ 'Ere we are agyne ! ” “ Cor ! Call this Wipers ? We've got aht at the wrong station. ” “ How art tha, lass ? ” “ Oh, oh, oh, it's a lovely war ! ”

All in Skindles' dining-room hurried to the wide entrance of the hotel, and then along the pavement to the corner of the street round which the marching men had turned. There, through the darkness of a narrow artery, went a column of khaki figures : Scots pipers with kilts swinging rhythmically and white knees flashing ; English Tommies with rifles slung and tunics opened at the throat ; bandsmen with their instruments in black bags. It was only the soldiers, late arrived, who would take their part in to-morrow's ceremony. (Or to-day's, for it was after midnight now.) But, for the moment, they annihilated the years, and the Past was in Ypres again. As they receded up the cobbles, and the darkness took them, they carried a song towards the Menin Gate :

“ If you were the only girl in the world,
And I were the only boy,
Nothing else would matter in the world to-day. . . . ”

CHAPTER V

1927

ON the ship returning from Ostend to Dover Tony sat in his chair, recalling the ceremony which he had watched the previous day. The dropping of the flags, the music of the bugles and pipes, the singing of the mourners had stirred again all the old aspiration; but he had known, even as it quickened his heart, that it would be powerless to divert him back to service and away from the pursuit of his fame and Mary's adoration. He must go on. And in the car, bumping over the flat roads between Ypres and Ostend, he had thought much of the dead men who could not return, like this, to life and love. So! There it was. . . . Quickly the ship made Dover, and the Channel rolled between him and the Menin Arch.

It was pleasant to find Peggy in his home when he entered it that night. She was to stay with them for the last few days before the holiday, and Michael, who had his duties in Southend, or pretended to have, was to meet them all at the quayside. It was as if Peggy had come back into his life for a little while. They talked for hours of the old Kensington home, and told each other tales of that far-away Family which, except for their two selves and Joyce away in India, existed no more. And sometimes behind his talk Tony would think his own thoughts; he would look at Peggy's widening hips and enlarging body, at her weary workaday hands, at the face now sad, now lively, and rather beautiful still, with its large eyes and large, soft generous mouth that had once been the Family Joke; and he would think that this Peggy was what he might have been, if ever he had been able to give himself wholly to God. She had always been so like him—a feminine translation of himself—and, in her feminine way, she had been able to rest happily in her

God. Happily? Well, no; she had longed for too many things that the world had not given her; and the old Peggy—or, rather, the far-away young Peggy—would never wholly die. Not happily, but with much serenity, and with much laughter for herself and all the other dear, quaint fools in the world. Soon they were discussing—Tony always arrived at this topic nowadays, if he could find a listener—Love, with especial reference to Irregular Love; and she surprised him with the charity of her view. From such an enthusiastic Anglo-Catholic he had expected a loyal condemnation of all his liberal theory; instead, she furrowed her brow and offered: "Yes . . . yes, I can imagine a woman finding a new and better love"—very like him, she had immediately applied the problem to herself—"and thinking, 'Of course I can't ask the Church to bless this, but I wouldn't mind taking it to——'"

Tony knew to Whom she meant.

"But would you—would you suggest"—he dodged seriousness by a little flippancy—"that this party should leave her husband and go to the other lad?"

"Ah, that would depend on a lot of things," said Peggy brightly. She was deeply interested, since it might be a delightful story for herself. "On his happiness, poor lamb; and on children, for instance. The hussy might have children."

"Well, say he consented to her going——"

"Then he was a sweet soul——"

"Yes, granted. And say she had four children, aged respectively fourteen, twelve, ten and eight?"

"She must have been an attractive dame," laughed Peggy, "or else she married very young. However, in that case, I think the children win. Surely?"

"But that's what I can't see," argued Tony emphatically, and he got up to walk about with the argument. "I can't see that the children have any right to inflict a lifetime of suffering on a parent—any more than—the other way round. Can you?"

And Peggy, after long thought—during which, no doubt, she met a pleasing creature, and fell in love with him, and told Michael, who forgave her—Peggy proffered a typical Peggy answer, somewhat illogical and wholly illuminating.

"Ah, but after she'd suffered, she'd have such a lot more to give the children. It would be a pity to deny them that."

Honor had come in towards the end of the argument, and her comment was so gay and impersonal that it hurt Tony

like a whip-lash. "Well, I think you're both talking a lot of nonsense," she said. "How could it ever be right for anyone to leave their children?"

Now it was the morning, and Honor, Peggy and he were in the train that was bearing them, through ceaseless rain, to the harbour and the ship. His heart beat rapidly as they drew near the harbour town; it played an idiot game as they left the train and crossed to quayside and gangway. He realized little of the *Sagaman's* size, shape or colour as he stumbled up its gangway; for he had seen Mr. Leith, in a cap and a heavy grey ulster, standing on the deck to greet them; and Mary, in a red hat and fawn waterproof, loitering unhappily near; and, three yards away, Father Michael, in a parson's black cloth but a layman's collar, leaning his long body on the rail and grinning his welcome.

"Well, well, well," exclaimed Mr. Leith jovially, "this is fine!"

Tony presented him to Honor.

"Delighted to meet you, dear lady, I'm sure. Meet my daughter."

Tony brought Mary forward, his hand pressing comfort and encouragement on her arm.

"This is Mary, Honor, of whom you have heard so much."

Mary slightly threw back her head, as one does who calls up all her resolution; and she extended her hand to Honor, and looked at her with a deathly white face.

Tony turned away, and the moisture moved on his forehead. As he turned, he became conscious of the dark eyes of Michael Saffery appraising Mary.

A confused, hurrying hour, in which, automatically, he found cabins, sought out baggage, and unpacked—and through it all, beating within a head made of wood, the one thought: "That beautiful child, who has always been so sparkling and so happy—she is suffering—oh, what can I do for her? What can I do to give her some happiness?" He escaped from the others, and hastened along the deck, hoping he might find her alone somewhere. He found her: she too had escaped, and was resting an elbow on the rail and watching the dockyard men at their last play with the ropes. As she saw him, she said only, still watching the men: "Well, what's this going to be like?"

"We'll be alone sometimes," he murmured.

"Oh, no, no; we must keep apart. Keep away from me all the time. Please."

"But, Mary——"

"Oh, yes, yes," she insisted. "For *her* sake."

He watched the quay in silence. One could not argue now.

"My darling," he said at last—very low, because other people were coming to the rail to watch the departure, "you will know that, whether I'm with you or away from you, I am thinking of you."

"I am always thinking of you," she answered simply.

Soon after that the ship put out.

CHAPTER VI

TO ROMSDALS FJORD

TONY had supposed that Mary would suffer jealousy and want of him in the *Sagaman's* woman-filled halls; he had not foreseen that the torments would be his.

There was a youth on board. Great God, what a power for torment was that bright, unoffending youth! He was no dark young philanderer, with sensual eyes; but a pleasant, fair-skinned schoolboy from Oxford with gentle manners and attractive ways. Twenty-one, perhaps, and graceful as they made them, he waltzed and fox-trotted better than a dancing master. He found Mary on this first night of the voyage, when there was dancing in the lounge; and he kept her for his partner while all eyes watched them. Such a pair! Not till this moment had Tony, seeing himself as the centre of a love story rather than Mary, reflected that she would be the prettiest girl on board and one of the most practised dancers, and that the men—death take them!—would be all around her. It would have been less agonizing if she had shared her favours among these men; but she seemed always to prefer young Roger Kingsley. And he—his surrender to her was as simple and honest as himself. He was in love with her from the first dance. He sought her all the night afterwards, he sat against the wall with her in lively or serious chat, and he led her out into the darkness of the deck.

Tony was nothing more than a jealous animal now. Everything else slipped from him; all tenderness, all compunction. His mouth squared by pain, he found himself brandishing defiance and contempt before the eyes of Mary. He danced ostentatiously with other women, and studied to be seen by her, as he laughed into their eyes—though all the while he heard little of their talk, and his heart was like a perishing bird

in its cage. At the close of a waltz with Peggy he swung a glance around the room to see if Mary and Roger were still together. Both were gone. His sickness almost physical, he drifted on to the deck, to torture himself with a sight of them. There they were, leaning side by side on the rail, and watching the sea go by.

He wandered away. To return to the brightness of the lounge was impossible; and he climbed up a stairway to the boat-deck, and found some comfort there in the assault against his brows of a cold head-wind. To think that he had read of jealousy in a hundred books, and even written of it in his own stories; and yet only now, when he was nearing forty, had he learnt the meaning of the word. Dark angels! who was this taut creature, standing among the ship's boats with the wind bullying his hair? Not any popular clergyman known to Thamesmouth; not any kindly husband known to Honor; not any idealistic brother known to Peggy; but some stranger risen from the depth of Antony O'Grogan, who ground his teeth like a wild man in a den. Let him but think of Mary giving her kisses to other men, and he could believe that he would rather see her dead—and denied alike to him and to them. He could even imagine himself wanting to destroy her beauty, by a blow across the face, rather than leave it to tempt other men. Imagination, rioting, showed him Mary as the wife of Roger in submission to him on their bridal night; and he sat down on a hatchway with his head between his hands. Oh, why were tortures like this sent into the world?

"Never again. . . . Never again. . . . Christ, no! . . . Never again."

He had spoken these words aloud to the wind. They were a vow never again to make trial of this madness called "love." If Mary, in the end, were lost to him, and he had thoughts of seeking another such, he would remember this night, when the *Sagaman* was heading through the cold banks of the North Sea. He would remember all the ruin of the last months: the idleness, the recoil from all work, all talk, all play, the ceaseless introversion, the waiting—the furtive waiting round corners—to see her, the ache in the brows, the tension in the cheeks, and the yellow sickness in the mouth. No, not again.

Swaying a little, he went down to his cabin to bed. He would not see any more of Mary and Roger. He dared not see any more. All night he tossed in his bunk. Unreasoning anger threw

him from side to side, or forced him on his feet to get water to his mouth. To-morrow, by being very cold to Mary and by attracting other women to his side, he would teach her whether it had been a little thing to offer her his love. She should learn to-morrow. . . . This scheme eased his restlessness. It became a pleasant pastime to make his plans ; and with them shaping in his mind, he fell asleep.

Next day he enjoyed his deliberate avoidance of her ; enjoyed seeing the bewilderment and distress in her eyes ; enjoyed a glimpse of her sitting alone in a deck-chair with her sad unseeing gaze fixed on the horizon where the mountain-mass of Norway rose grey in the sky. Not wholly enjoyed this last, for something in him whispered, " Poor child, poor child ! Go up to her and be kind to her ; " but he could not. Oh, why was it pleasurable to hurt the thing one loved ?

That night he was punished for it. The punishment was merciless ; and he took it contritely. Fretted out of the lounge by the prolonged absence of Mary and Roger, he was walking round and round the decks to find the torturing sight of them together ; he had walked many times round the promenade deck, then up among the boats on the boat-deck, then down again to the promenade deck that his glance might swing through the lighted windows of the lounge and sweep the company there—oh, this watching and hunting, this furtive spying ! never again would he sink himself in the contemptible abyss !—he had abandoned walking and was leaning on the rail, listlessly watching the night-blue seas, when he glimpsed on the rail of the deck below the arm of a white serge coat. It pierced him with a pang of recognition : it was Mary's. Other people had come to the rails, for the ship was gliding with stealthy silence into the harbour of Bergen. But Tony saw little of that old capital floating at the foot of its seven hills ; it was nothing to him ; the people looked at Bergen, but he leaned forward and looked down at Mary who had put out the world for him. At once the pang of recognition became a stab of dismay : the black coat of a man was beside her, and, as far as he could see, straining his eyes through the darkness, the man was resting his hand on hers.

" Oh, my God ! "

Reeling a little, he turned and walked away. After a few unsteady steps, he stood still, hands in pockets and head drooping.

"Well, I deserved that, I suppose. And I got it. By heaven, I got it."

Then he told himself that he could suffer this rack no longer. He must cut out this love; cut it out. The vicious words gave relief. "I'll cut it out here and now. I can and will. It's all a matter of thought, and one can master one's thought. At the back of my mind I have always doubted whether it isn't an auto-suggested thing. Before ever I saw her I had resolved to fall in love with the first beautiful face that would give itself to me. I saw her, and I generated all this emotion out of myself; she didn't generate it out of me. Whenever she has looked less than beautiful or spoken too childishly, I have wondered if I really wanted her. And, in any case, I don't really believe that I am going to give up Honor, and the home that I have built, and all the comfort with which I have surrounded myself, and half my small fortune and most of my financial security. I don't *think* I believe it. I am much too timid, these days. I just wanted another romance before it was too late. I must admit all this, and then I can be done with it. One effort of the will, and it's all over. I make that effort. I am done with it."

He believed he was; and an immense peace filled him. Briskly, though the wooden ache was still in his head, he walked back to the lounge to take his part in the dancing. In the next hour he danced with Honor, with Peggy, and with other women; and he was amazed how genuine his liveliness had become; his body even seemed to share in the release, and for the first time in weeks he had an appetite and was able to eat heartily of the savouries and sandwiches that a steward was dispensing in a corner. Now back to another dance. How splendid to have one's life contented and serene again! He was dancing with Honor now and thinking, under his talk, how glad he was to be free from all danger of wounding her, when a white coat came into the lounge and the light fell on the pale face of Mary. Just that sight of her face and he was in the depths of his desire again. And he thanked Heaven; he was suffering again, but he was alive. He did not *want* to be done with it. It was too brilliant, too exquisitely sweet; and he would pay every price for it.

Sanity returned to him: at least so much of sanity as would tell him that Mary, borne down with love of him, could have nothing but a dreamy gratitude to give to Roger Kingsley.

Say she had allowed this Roger to court her, and even to touch her hand, it could have raised no response in her. There may have been a flirt in her once, but his own onslaught had stunned that flirt to sleep, certainly for long months, and perhaps for ever. In punishing her for nothing he had behaved like a madman.

The orchestra started a new dance ; and hastily, lest another should reach her first, he strode across the floor towards her.

"We have yet to have our dance, Mary."

Without a word she rose to partner him.

"I shall dance with you as often as I like now," he said, when they were weaving their way through the other couples.

"Will you?" There was no laughter in her upturned glance. "Why?"

"Because there is no danger any more."

"How is that?"

"All is over between us. This night I cut out my love for you for ever. Some sixty minutes ago."

Terror started in her eyes ; and the sight of it delighted and charged his heart.

"Tony ; what do you mean?"

"Sixty minutes ago I saw you and Roger Kingsley on the deck together."

"Oh, *him* !"

"Yes, *him*. And, as far as I could see, from my position on the deck above, you let him rest his hand on yours."

"I did not ! Tony, I did not !"

"Then, my dear, I imagined it. But I think that, when I did so, I died for ten seconds."

She could not doubt the sincerity of these words, and, as they danced on, she murmured, "Ah, you mustn't imagine these things. Don't you know that——"

"Wait——" They were passing close to another pair.

"Don't you know," she asked softly, "that no one else means anything to me but you?"

"Mary, I believe I know it now."

"Well, please know it."

There was something so complete in this giving of herself ; it was so free from his own trickeries, and so sweetly business-like in its statement of how her account stood, that he could only murmur, "My beloved !" and press her closer to him. And an hour ago he had doubted whether he loved this child.

"It's strange," he said later, "but you seem to have changed. It's as though you had recently become ten years older."

"I feel different," she said, looking up into his eyes.

"D'you know: a few days ago I thought of you as a child; now I think of you almost as a woman."

"I feel older," she agreed, and suddenly drooped away from him. "Oh, my dear, I'm so afraid it'll all have to end."

"No, no; it can't. It mustn't."

"But it will. I didn't know what I was doing till I met Honor. Now I think of her all day. We must end it."

"Don't say it, Mary! I can't bear it. I love you. One day I am going to marry you."

"Oh, be quiet, be quiet! . . . Listen, Tony: if I feel sure that that can never be, wouldn't you rather—hadn't we better make the wrench at once, and not later on, when it may hurt you more?"

"Hurt *me*?"

"Yes. I should have liked to be happy for a little while longer. But I don't want to be selfish. I don't want to take my happiness now, if it'll mean a greater pain for *you* later on. Oh, you *must* see what I mean."

"Listen, Mary: every day I know you I discover new things to love in you; and I think the greatest discovery of all is your amazing sympathy. I've never known anything like it."

Her eyebrows lifted in amusement: she could not see that she was different from others.

"And you must give me more of you after this voyage," he begged. "Much more, before we talk of parting. It's only the hope of that, that enables me to endure this ghastly trip."

"Is it so awful for you?" she asked.

"Awful? It's Hell. Having you near me all day, and yet never being allowed to have you alone. Seeing you always, and yet never being able to touch you or kiss you——"

"Come with me," she said.

And, removing her arm from his waist, but still holding his right hand, she drew him through the doors to the alley-way without. There she released his hand, for out of the dance room no one must see them linked; and, moving quickly, she walked in front of him down the long vista between the state-room walls, the leader of this enterprise. Without once turning to explain, she went on. Where the alley-way branched

and became a bay leading to a curtained port-hole, she stopped and faced him.

“Quickly,” she said.

And she hung her arms around his neck.

“O Mary!”

Afterwards—for ever afterwards—that kiss stood isolated in memory. It was a short embrace: she had pressed hard on his lips, touched his hair, and whispered, “Darling”: then drawn away, pressed his hand affectionately, and vanished. But it had borne the whole of healing, and it left him saturated with happiness.

He walked back to the lounge and the dancers; and all that night he felt on his mouth the impress of that hard visit, and knew that her lips were treasuring the same hurt. Rapt in happiness, he danced the last hour away and slept like a child that night.

The healing endured all the next day. He hardly cared if he saw or spoke to Mary; he was content to sit alone, or walk alone. The ship was moving in a fairway between skerries and mainland, and it seemed to him that his serenity matched the stillness of the dreaming channel. The bows headed between the mountains of the Sogne Fjord, and his own happiness was at one with the majestic peace around.

Down every arm of the fjord, as the *Sagaman* plied on, came the music of waterfalls. . . .

Balholm, and the ship stood.

A wide unruffled water stretched to the Balholm slopes against whose brink the ferry-boats were moored. From painted houses higher up the hill some women in gay bodices and with white skauts over their heads came bringing their baskets down to the boats. They moved on soundless feet. High above them orchard and cornfield and green saeter hung on to the mountain-side till the very snowfields began. On the *Sagaman's* left a ship with high prow and square sail slept beneath the frown of a mountain. It might have been the wraith of a Vikings' ship which sailed from this fjord to the ravaging of England twelve hundred years before. . . .

Hours passed before he returned from his dreamland country, with its strange still radiance, into the white daylight

of clear thought. Honor's voice called him back. Honor, Peggy, and Michael were standing near him, their eyes fronting with something of awe the towering cliffs of Hornelen, and Honor's voice cried: "Oh, Tony, isn't it wonderful? Tony, why don't you go into raptures about it? How can you just stand there and *look*? Peggy, I'm afraid your brother, my husband, is getting old. He is losing his capacity for enjoyment."

"My husband." The simple trust of it. He responded with a suitable laugh, and walked away. In the white daylight of clear thought was it imaginable that he could desert this simple trust and leave Honor stricken and stupefied behind him? No; his brain could not hold the thought. But a final good-bye to Mary; was this thought any more conceivable? No, his brain recoiled from it. Either way he looked, there was nothing but a blinded road; and, facing either blind wall, his brain stood still.

"What will happen I don't know. I am beaten by it."

Next morning a simple thing happened, and yet it was the most momentous event in Antony O'Grogan's life. It was a thought, no more; and yet it carried all his future within it, as the acorn carries the oak. The *Sagaman* was slipping through the morning light, softly as a phantom, into the Romsdals Fjord. All round, the mountains shut in the silence, and Tony's abstracted gaze, seeking the skyline, rested on the crowning peak of the Romsdalshorn. He saw it and yet he did not see it; and opposite it he saw, and yet did not see, the satanic points of the Trolltinderne. He had just been realizing that in the end, in the almost certain end, things would fall back as they had been in the past, he with Honor, and Mary out of sight for ever—and lo! he had experienced in one of those flashing thoughts, not two heart-beats long, which possibly he alone would have noticed and worried over, a faint suggestion of relief. And the relief had had its root in meanness: for a second he had distinctly thought that, Mary lost, he would be done with all the expense her entertainment had involved.

This was not the thought that carried the Future; it was the one that followed its perception. A revelation followed. A simple revelation, perhaps; but as clearly seen, as surely possessed, as intensely experienced, as any your Buddhas find beneath the Bo-trees. A truism, perhaps; but it is one thing to give lip-service to a truism, and another thing to live it

suddenly and poignantly in the life. That moment he saw it: people bemoaned that love was a transient thing, a dear, fading vanity that left them stranded; and the fault was not in love but in themselves. They all wanted to love perfectly; in their secret hearts all men dreamed the same dream, and none of them saw that, if they wanted this thing, they must work for it, enlarging and enlarging their natures into vessels big enough to hold it. Instead, they indulged the sweet fancy, and spent their waiting lives narrowing and narrowing their natures by indulging their meanness, their possessiveness, their conceit, their callousness, and all those qualities that would constrict the love when it came. So simple! It was his self-centred nature that had commanded the recession of his love for Honor—though possibly, since she satisfied him so little, he would have had to be selfless indeed to save *that*. It was the same accursed nature—only ten years' harder—that was threatening these awful, these heart-stopping halts in his love for Mary. And by Heaven, that nature was going! He would smash it, before he let it throttle his love for Mary.

The ship was at Naes, in the Romsdals Fjord; and the people, crowding the deck, were pointing to a spectacle. Honor, Peggy and Mary gasped at it, while Michael clicked a camera, and Mr. Leith hurriedly unstrapped his own. Across the face of the mountains, clouds were sailing in long strips, like white airships cruising above the valley; and other cloud masses were pouring down the gorges like cataracts, but cataracts which had been stilled by a halt in Time. Tony stared with the rest, but he was not looking at any magnificence of the outer world; he was looking at inward things. He stared at a sailing cloud and at its shadow crossing the mountain's face; and he told himself that from this hour he would slowly and steadily destroy all those things—meanness, cruelty, vanity, self-sufficiency—which had threatened his love for Mary. He loved her, and he would release the power to love her more. He would knock down the constraining walls. Forty though he might be, he would succeed. He would succeed, because the driving desire was strong enough.

This revelation which had come to him in the Romsdals Fjord was very like, so he saw, the experience called "conversion." Perhaps his nature, with the monk in it, was sure to have come to such an experience sooner or later. It had the same overwhelming conviction of sin; the same sense of

sudden sight, and the same assurance of inflooding power. Only it looked, not towards a god, but towards a creature.

All that day (he might laugh at himself, but he believed in the experience) he walked the deck with something of the breathless hope of the converted; and when in the evening light the *Sagaman* bore him out of the Romsdals Fjord he looked back with a lively affection towards this place of still water and dark mountains, where he had met with a thought which would change his life.

CHAPTER VII

PAST TORGHATTEN

"IT is to be hoped she sees nothing," said Father Saffery, lighting a last pipe. His eyes, over the match-flame, were watching Honor as she passed out of the card-room. Peggy was watching him; and, knowing all about her husband and his histrionic talent, she saw that he had filled his eyes, for Mr. Leith's entertainment, with a twinkling mischief and mystery.

"Why, what are you hinting at?" she asked, gathering up the abandoned cards on the table and beginning to make them into a pack.

"Steward!" called Mr. Leith, who was their only other companion, now that Honor had gone. "Here, my lad!" and, having commanded whiskies for himself and the father, and lemonade for the father's lady, he waved the lad away. "Well, sir, what is it? What should she see on the deck?"

"Your daughter for one," laughed Father Michael.

"Flirting, I suppose. That's no news for me. Who's the poor guy this time?"

"It ought not to be beyond our united wisdom to guess," suggested Father Michael, who was apt, like many parsons, to see a refined humour in the employment of large sentences for little matters.

"That young Roger Who-do-you-call-it, I suppose."

"Gracious, no! You're badly out of your reckoning." Father Michael's pipe was not drawing well, and he pressed down the tobacco with the top of his fountain pen. "Peggy can guess better than that."

Peggy turned towards her husband; anger had leapt behind her eyes. "I don't know who you mean—at all."

"Not the parson?" demanded Mr. Leith. "Saving your presence, sir—'the young parson,' I should have said. Not young brother-in-law?"

"Even so."

"Don't be silly, Michael," Peggy intervened. "Tony isn't that type at all, and you know it."

"Oh, it's nothing serious," said Michael. "A very mild affair, no doubt. And very venial. Confound it, sir, if I were seated in an Arctic twilight with such a beautiful daughter as yours, I fear—I greatly fear I should be tempted to hold her hand. And I think I'd absolve myself later."

Peggy turned away from him with some distaste.

"Sure! Yes, but . . . yes, but . . ." Mr. Leith was perturbed. "She mustn't flirt with *him*. Let her stick to Who-do-you-call-it."

"He was never in the running at all."

"Or, better still," continued Mr. Leith, who was inclined to pay more attention to his own remarks than to those of his audience, "let her grow out of that sort of poppy-nonsense as soon as possible. I'm getting tired of it. She comes home at three o'clock in the morning, half a dozen times a week, and with a different lad each time. Lady Peggy, at what age did you begin to get a kick out of something else besides froth? Was she a flirt, sir, when you rounded her up? She must have been young enough—if you'll forgive me. Ah!—"

The drinks had arrived, and he was handing them round. He tossed some coins on to the steward's tray, and renounced, with a large gesture, all claim to his change. "What's Who-do-you-call-it done, that he's got the go-by?"

"He was never more than the smoke-screen," said Michael, looking into the top of his glass and watching the bubbles burst. "It's Tony she's fond of."

"'Fond of'! But she *can't* be fond of him. She *mustn't* be. Not in that way. You don't suggest that it's serious?"

"Oh, no; no, no, no." Father Michael was hearty about it. "Mercy, no. But I *do* think he ought to call a halt now. Peggy, you should give him some sisterly counsel. I do honestly think he's making her too fond of him."

"What makes you say that?" demanded Mr. Leith.

"Her eyes never leave him."

Mr. Leith turned his own eyes towards the window, as if he could see Mary on the deck and would consider her anew.

"It's nonsense," murmured Peggy, to the table-top.

"It's not nonsense," Michael retorted. "Everybody can see it. For a man as clever as Tony, or one reputed to be as clever, he's blind enough sometimes, I must say." The festering sore began to discharge. "It's always the same with these clever ones: their vaunted imagination is seldom equal to crediting other people with sight and imagination."

"He *is* a brilliant young man, I suppose?" asked Mr. Leith.

"Oh, yes, no doubt." Father Michael had no desire to be thought ungenerous. "I'd be the last to deny it. He knows how to put together a really amusing yarn that catches the public taste. I confess that I laughed at his last book—laughed immoderately. But it would be better, I always think, if he mingled a little wisdom with his cleverness. I can't see that he's being very wise in attacking his own cloth and thereby setting half his congregation about his ears. He won't advance the Kingdom of God among men by getting himself disliked."

"Those who love him, love him," murmured Peggy, to the table-top.

At that moment she hated her husband. With his long aristocratic figure, his priestly countenance, his even sympathetic voice, he would convey an impression of sense and sanctity to this man, even as, years ago, he had conveyed it to her. At that moment, if she had brought her real thought out of the dark, she would have seen it to be: "How can a soul so mean have a house so gracious?"

"Most people haven't the courage to get themselves disliked," she said; and added merrily, "I haven't, for one. Never, never had."

"Yes, but *is* it courage?" queried Father Michael enthusiastically. "*Is* it courage, or is it—well, a desire for notoriety? A priest's courage, it seems to me, might pursue a nobler road than the writing of sensational books whose jesting, to say the least of it, is somewhat unchaste."

"I must read 'em," said Mr. Leith, promptly. "I've never known before what they were about."

Peggy defended them to this new purchaser. "They are only sensational because they're clever enough to create a sensation."

"Ah," Michael shook a kindly head, "you'll never get my wife to hear a word against her brother, or his books. And quite right too! But I still maintain that there's such a thing

as loyalty to one's Church and one's cloth. Lampooning one's own order—it simply isn't done."

Peggy's foot beat impatiently. "Oh, but isn't it possible to attack a thing out of loyalty to it? You're all so dreadfully commonplace! Tony's an artist, and he's driven by some grander tyranny than your potty little public-school rules of what is done and what isn't done——"

"Bravo, Lady Peggy!" cried Mr. Leith.

"But wait," interrupted Father Michael, who was now annoyed. "You're presupposing that he's wholly sincere. But is he?——"

("Who are you to talk about sincerity?" thought Peggy; and suddenly, inexplicably, felt a need to giggle.)

"—All that Socialistic preaching at the time of the Strike, how much of that was sincerity, and how much a desire to be different from other people? Socialist? He doesn't seem to be the perfect Socialist in his manner of living. Isn't it always the same, Leith: these Socialists write and preach their communism, but one never sees them handing back their profits to the State."

"Oh, absolutely, absolutely," nodded Mr. Leith in ardent agreement. "Yeah."

"He's *not* a Socialist," Peggy protested. "When will you understand that it's quite possible to differ from your Alderman Scrases and Canon Broadleys without being a Socialist? *I* do. And, by the way, *you* pretended to be a Socialist when we were first married, and I had an awful job, I remember, to be one too, like a good wife. It was a huge relief when you began to get slack. I'm not a Socialist really: my head goes that way, but my heart's all with Norman barons and cavaliers and Charles the First and French aristocrats. And I want to colour the map red. I oughtn't to, I know, but I do."

"Well, let's leave his sincerity out of it," agreed Michael. "I don't really want to deny him some sincerity; not for a moment. But is he wise? Is he wise, having written such books, to behave as carelessly as he does?"

"How 'carelessly'?"

"Well, anyone can see that he's indifferent to Honor, and not at all indifferent to other women. Especially young ones. Stories about him are beginning to go the round, already. Mostly exaggerated, I've no doubt; but what's the sense in

enraging half your brethren and then putting a weapon in their hands? Not all clergy are saints——”

“They are not,” Peggy confirmed significantly.

“No; and I meet them, and hear what they say.”

“Then they’re jealous of him,” pronounced Peggy. “And so are you, my dear, I believe.”

“Jealous! *Jealous!*” This ruffled Father Michael exceedingly. “No, hardly that. I’d rather have my little bit of local reputation, such as it is, and know it free from reproach, than have a world-wide fame that was mixed up with calumny.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t!” cried Peggy. “I’d rather be famous and scandalous any day than just obscure.”

The word “obscure” did nothing to smooth the father’s pelt. “Ah well, I am but an obscure priest, I know,” he sighed huffily.

“Yes,” pursued Peggy in merry heedlessness; “and *I’m* jealous of Tony, if no one else is. I wanted to do big things too, but I haven’t done them—alas! alas! Tony was always the clever one of the Family.”

“Instead you married me,” suggested her husband, in a mood to be aggrieved.

“Exactly!” Peggy laughed; and, lest she had offended him, laid her hand on the back of his.

For some time Mr. Leith had not been amused by these reminiscences; and now he got up and pressed out the stump of his cigar.

“I think I had better go and look for this girl. Can’t have her vamping respectable parsons. Good night, good people.”

He was gone, and Peggy turned and charged her husband. “Why did you do that?”

“I did it deliberately,” he informed her. “Tony’s behaviour simply isn’t good enough. I did it for the child’s sake, and for his.”

Out on the promenade deck, in two long deck-chairs that touched, Tony and Mary sat pleasantly talking or meeting each other in a reciprocal silence. Often his hand sought hers, and she allowed it to rest in his clasp. The ship was cleaving through a water so smooth and thick that it might have been

milk, and with a sound so level and continuous that it might have been silence.

The late night was lighter than dusk, and flushed with a rosy glow, because the Arctic sunset was at hand.

From where they sat, not seeing the furrowed water nor the long burnished wake, but only the stable panorama of sky between rail and upper deck, it seemed as if the ship was at half-speed or dead-slow. No other passengers disturbed their gossip or their reveries, because all had abandoned rugs and chairs an hour before, and gone within, when, for the first time on the voyage, the soft night-air began to chill with the breath of far-away ice. The furry collar of Mary's white coat was tight about her ears, and sometimes the hand in Tony's trembled, as the cold breath came again.

Breaking a silence, she announced with deliberate cheerfulness: "Nothing will come of it all." She even tossed up and down her little gold powder-box, to show how cheerful she was; and once, when she nearly missed her catch, she snatched her hand from Tony's to save the box from falling. "I shall go back the way I came—up the beloved St. Lawrence—fairly happy in some ways, and with such a lot to think about."

"Perhaps I shall be with you."

"No. Talk sense, Tony dear. You know it's impossible."

"I'm sure I do not."

"Oh, yes, you do. In your heart you do. Listen, Tony: I'm trying to grow up."

"What does that mean, Mary?"

"I'm trying to grow up and realize that I can't always have what I want. But, oh dear, oh dear, oh *dear*, isn't it difficult? I shall go back, and one of these days I shall have my cottage by a lake in Western Ontario, and there I shall try to enjoy myself quite a lot. . . . Tony, do you think the memory of all this will become dim? Oh, I hope not!"

He recovered her hand and pressed it. "It will dim a little."

"Tony, it's so terrible to think that everyone in the world is really alone."

"Years ago," answered Tony, "a girl said almost those very words to me. Twenty-three years ago."

"That was Sybil?"

"Yes. How do you know?"

"I have been reading your poems again—which explains, no doubt, why I made that bright remark just now. Tony,

I love them! They're wonderful. I suppose you know"—she turned and gave him a shy, impudent look—"that they're easily the best thing you've ever done?"

"I think so. But, as far as I can remember, you are the first person who has said so."

"Oh, but they are! I've loved them always, but it's only in these last days that I've seen how marvellous they are. They haunt me—nearly all of them. There's the old woman in 'On the Road to Condé-Folie'——"

"I wrote that in a village behind the Somme."

"And did you really see her?"

"Yes; I passed her, and wrote those verses all the way home."

"Well, I suppose I shall be like her one day. Listen." Her mouth pursed in a familiar movement as, shyly, she controlled a smile:

"So bowed, old dame, with heavy feet and slow,
Through the rearward light of this retreating sun,
Your small, unworthy piece of day-work done,
Across the shadows on the road you go.

The wind is quiet, and the poplars still
And the road is level that the younger feet
Go confidently on to Condé Street;
And yet you walk as though you climbed a hill.

I wonder, did you dream when you were small
Of a full life, gaily coloured? And it's gone—
Too faded for your thoughts to dwell upon;
Old woman, tell me, was it worth it all?

You loved with suffering, say, as now do I——"

Tony watched her face as she spoke these words, but she only gazed at the deck-rail in front of her, and proceeded, half-smiling:

"And here and there a task you carried through,
And often you despaired, as I this evening do,
Nor dared to think you'd take so long to die.

And now towards the end, and what it brings,
You move unlabouring, for it's all too late.
You wait.

Forgive me, I am young and ask these things:
Old lady, is it beautiful to wait?"

Tony gave her his gratitude by a tight gripping of her hand. Then abruptly she jumped up and looked down on him with laughing eyes. "Oh, but I don't want to die! I want to live as long as *you're* in the world; and then, when I hear that you're dead, I shall have a big fight not to follow you, but I'll see it through. . . . Or perhaps I shall have forgotten quite a lot by then. . . ." She looked away. "I hope not."

"Mary . . . we don't know what'll happen."

Not heeding this, she continued looking down at him almost mischievously. "But why did you ask her, Was it worth it all? You say she 'loved with suffering' once, well——?" and her eyebrows arched, as if they would inquire, Didn't that prove her point?

"You think it's worth it?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" Her head shook from side to side to emphasize each yes. "A thousand, thousand times! I've been telling myself every minute in these last days that no matter what happens now, I'm glad I have lived."

Honor did not find her husband on the deck; nor Mr. Leith his daughter. Tony and Mary had parted a half-hour before, when the cold had increased. Tony had gone to his cabin and his bunk, and lain there wakeful; and long after Honor was asleep he remained awake. He was thinking of the day that had passed; and not of Trondhjem and its streets which they had visited, nor of Torghattan with its tunnelled mountain through which the blue sky shone, but of the extraordinary evidence which the long hours had given him that his nature had turned a sudden corner after the revelation in Romsdals Fjord. Corner?—it seemed more like a *volte-face*! Something like this had happened once before, outside the pill-box at Passchendaele, but in a smaller way; this seemed so extraordinarily complete. It was complete, he supposed, because it drew its power from the strongest desire of his life. Presumably he had once loved his little meannesses and cruelties and conceits, or he would not have indulged them; now he had nothing but detestation for them, and he could not believe that he would indulge them any more. They had got in the way of his love for Mary, and he had thrown them from his path. All the day he had been unable to act the tiniest lie before Honor, or

to harbour any of the old resentment against her; unable to hate Michael; unable to feel intolerance of the stupidity of other passengers, or to floor the poor souls with a vision of his own parts. For Mary his feeling had swelled into a tenderness so overwhelming that it was impatient to give all. How in pity's name had he once found pleasure in heightening her love by piercing it with disappointments and distress? It was in remorse for those old, inconceivable deeds that he had found her to-night and sat at her side, to give her all the happiness he could. They had been so little together that no one would notice this single indulgence, he had said.

Difficult to sleep with memory revisiting the thoughts of the day and reason battling with a conflict to which they pointed. They pointed to a perfect dilemma: how was he ever to find a harmony between this new dutifulness to all, especially to Honor, and this new fixing of his life on Mary? In order to be worthy of Mary and able to love her more worthily, said the dilemma, he must deny himself and stay by Honor. Or did it? Did it say something else? His head ached with the argument, and his body tossed with it through the speechless night, while the *Sagaman*, alive beneath him, moved along the shoulder of the North towards the polar seas. Then a dream bore up and slipped unperceived among his waking thoughts. He was in a park of rolling lawns and ancient trees, and all its vistas were baleful and lowering because the wild bulls were loose. They might be anywhere—before him or behind him, near him or far away—and he hurried in panic towards the Mansion; though not, as he now realized, to escape the sinister bulls, but because the wounded were assembled there. A sweeping drive guided him to the portico, and he forced a way through the loiterers on its threshold, who were whispering their news to one another, or peering for a sight of the dead. In the hall of the Mansion people were hastening to and fro, and a nurse passed him, carrying a Nominal Roll of the wounded and the sick. He begged that he might see it; and when she handed it to him, he looked for the one name that he knew he would find. It was there: "Mary Leith." He stared at it, as if staring could make it disappear.

"Yes," said a voice—the voice of Mrs. Scrase, who had turned her face towards him as she followed the Alderman to the work of mercy. "Yes, *you* did this. . . . We might have known you'd bring her to this." "Precisely," sniffed the

Alderman, and raised his fingers to his bunched black tie and his high white collar, in an action that suggested indignation and contempt. "I foretold disaster from the first. Such men should not be allowed in the Church." They passed; and Tony became aware that the Alderman had prospered exceedingly, and that this was his home. "But where is she? where is she?" he demanded of the nurse. "Sister, please tell me;" and the nurse who was kind told him that she was in the little chalet at the northern end of the park.

Now he was hurrying down a glade between mountainous cliffs of rhododendron and azalea, and he could see the chalet standing among the pines at the avenue's end. Its door was bolted, but he burst it open, and went in. The interior was divided into two rooms, and round the walls of each there were ship's bunks with recumbent figures lying silent upon them. Canon Broadley, who was the only standing figure, came towards him softly and whispered, "Yes, she's in there, but don't go near her." "I must," said Tony. "No, don't go, don't go," Canon Broadley repeated, staring into Tony's eyes till the discomfort of his stare became a horror. With an effort that wrenched the heart Tony broke from that stare and ran into the inner room. "Don't go," called Canon Broadley; but he was in the room, standing there aghast. He was staring down at Mary, who was lying in one of the bunks. She had thrown vitriol over her face, and its features were eaten away. He said words of comfort to her, and tried to comfort her, and, after promising to return soon, slunk away.

He was back in the darkness of the park; and he knew he was never going to return to Mary. He felt guilty and mean as he slunk on, but glad of his escape. After all, it would be easier to stay with Honor, enjoying the old comfort and security and indulging the old habits, than to start a new life full of strain. Here was proof that it was only her beauty which had drawn him, and now that the beauty was gone, he was free——

"What did you say?" asked Honor, from her bed on the other side of their state-room. "Tony, what's the matter?"

He was sitting up in his bed, awake, and a blanching dawn was framed in the port-hole.

"Did I say something?" he asked.

"Yes. You called out 'Oh, no, no, no! I'll take care of you always.' You frightened me."

"Did I? I must have been dreaming."

He lay down again. Oh, no, no, no. That dream had been a lie. Whatever might happen to Mary he would never slink from her treacherously, like that. And certainly not now, after the experience in Romsdals Fjord. What had the dream meant? Perhaps that the old Adam, which he had thrust underground, had not died in a day, but had forced a way up in sleep. He might take longer to die than one had supposed. But die he should.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SHIP SLEWS ROUND

NEXT day they were in the polar circle, and at noon the *Sagaman* dropped anchor near the Svartisen Glacier. The passengers crowded the deck to stare at an ice-field which slanted down to the very brink of the sea. Under the hull the water was a calm silk; and the same sheen spread over its distances, emptying them of colour. It seemed asleep, as if tranced by the visit of the ice. Father Michael's camera was out; and Mr. Leith's; and Honor stood by them, shivering a little in her fur coat, for a breeze was blowing down the glacier's side. Mary seized the moment and approached Tony.

"Come along here. Quickly," she said. "Quickly, please."

And she led him up to the boat-deck, and along to a wind-screened shelter behind the funnels, where she stood and faced him. Her face was pale and frightened, and the wind had disarranged her hair. He glanced around to make sure that no one was in sight, and then put out his arm to draw her to him.

"No, no. . . . Oh, this is awful."

"What's worrying you, dearest?"

"Ah, they're all beginning to suspect. Daddy said something to me——"

"But that's nonsense. We've behaved splendidly—on the whole."

"I think he *did* see us last night."

"Who?"

"Father Saffery. Anyway he has said something to Daddy."

"The damned interfering hypocrite!"

"Hush, Tony. . . . I was awake all last night, and early this morning I knew that we mustn't be alone together any

more on this awful ship. We said so at first, and we were right."

"I won't have my movements determined by that sickly busybody——"

"Ah, but it's not him. It's right. . . . She's so good and kind."

"Very well, then, my darling, if it'll give you some peace. That's all that seems to matter to me now—that you should know happiness again."

"Happiness again!" she echoed despairingly.

"Yes. Do try to be happy. I love you."

"And you? Will you be very miserable?"

"A bit," he laughed. "But make it easy for me by not dancing too much with Roger Kingsley."

She frowned over this proposition; and one eyebrow, gradually arching, suggested a laughter in ambush. "Oh, but I think I had better dance quite a lot with him. And with all the others too. Then they'll just think that I'm flirting all round, and I just don't mind what they think about me, so long as I don't hurt you and Honor."

"You dear thing! Mary, I repeat—in case I haven't said it recently—I love you."

But Mary's eyes were on a stokehold ventilator. "And if I were to be seen moping alone, they might suspect the truth. And that means that we must have our one dance together sometimes in full view of them all. Listen: I may dance with the others, but as you said to me that first night, I shall be thinking of you all the time." She brought her gaze from the ventilator and laid it on him. "I shall be thinking of you for the rest of my life, I think."

And so to-morrow and to-morrow—if there be any to-morrow in seas where the sun is not setting—they played their dull little parts, he feigning an enjoyment of the sights to which the *Sagaman* carried them, she pretending to a pleasure in the attentions of her admirers. One midnight the *Sagaman* put out to the open sea, and the happy voyagers saw the midnight sun. They looked along a saffron pathway, which glistened on the sea, towards the sun's rim and its corona of orange. At different points Tony and Mary stood with the others and wished that their minds were free, like theirs, to apprehend and to wonder. But the midnight sun without was but a small thing compared with their shadows within. The

ship put back into Lyngen Fjord, and there they saw the reindeer and the Laplander herdsman; it rounded the Bird Rock and disturbed the crowding sea-fowl, which trembled on the spurs or flew into the air, screaming their right to this corner of the world; it anchored off North Cape, and the voyage had reached its goal. The *Sagaman* turned about, and really headed for to-morrow.

And now one night, when she was making for Bergen to bid good-bye to Norway, Tony asked his dance of Mary and whirled her away among the other waltzing couples. They remained silent, till she looked up and bantered him: "Say something soon, or they'll think it strange."

"How well you dance," he said.

"What a bright remark!"

"Oh God, what am I to say then? I always like the way you point your left foot."

"Do I?"

"Yes. You do it when you're walking and when you're dancing, and always with damnably provocative art."

"Ah, but it isn't deliberate," she explained, picking a fluff off his sleeve. "It's my good fortune, not my fault."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you know why I point my left foot?"

"No. I fancied it was devilry, and forgave you."

At this she rippled with laughter. "Oh dear, no! It's only because my left leg happens to be ever so slightly shorter than the other."

He gripped her tight; and she supposed that it was his sympathy.

"Yes," she said, looking up with the same gaiety, "my left shoe is built up the tiniest bit. When I was a child I had tubercular trouble in the hip-joint—don't hug me so!—you needn't be sympathetic about it, because it's all over now. . . . Why, you're trembling."

"My dear . . ." He let her suppose it was sympathy. He could not tell her that his head and face had tightened with an ache, his mouth gone dry, and his heart stopped, because her words, for a space, had annihilated all want of her.

"It's hot in here," he said, wiping his forehead. "Let's sit down for a little."

"We had better sit somewhere in view of the others."

"Oh, yes, yes. . . ." But did all that matter now? It seemed to belong to an ended story.

"Here we are!"

Brightly she led the way to two vacant chairs.

They sat together; and out of a grey misery he forced a merriness like her own. He made fun of a fat man who was spinning an enormous woman round and round, in the old style. "It must be like whisking the Romsdalshorn around," he suggested, while his heart deflated at the joke.

"And look what Father Michael's got in tow," laughed Mary.

He was about to make an unkind remark about Father Michael, when he recalled that all hate had fallen from him in the Romsdals Fjord. But was that experience annihilated too, if all want of Mary had gone? She had been its origin and fount of power. Oh, what had happened? Talk on, Mary, while I think it out, and try to escape from this pit.

It would be impossible to describe the sick utterness of the collapse that surrounded him in these seconds. He sat humpily, and hardly listened as Mary chattered. Trite and ineffective to call it hell, but if hell be a fog of defeat and despair in which one desires nothing any more but extinction and madness, and that as soon as may be, then Tony sat in that place now. She had spoken so trustfully and naturally of her shortened limb, without suspecting for an instant that his masculine desire, so largely created by her beauty, would reel beneath the blow. She did not see that news, which would have heightened her love, shivered his. His more than many men's, probably, because of his hunger for perfections. Oh, God, was it really gone, and every hope gone with it?

Then, suddenly, as he turned and looked at her pale oval face, and the black hair plaited over the ears, and the eyes that sometimes raised themselves to his, he remembered that terrible dream of a few nights before. He remembered it with a shock of wonder at its prevision. In that dream he had slunk from her because her beauty was shattered; and he had woken up crying out that the dream was a lie. And now, because he had heard that her beauty was ever so slightly flawed, he was being tempted to desert her. Was this a test for him? Yes. . . . Then, by Heaven, he would pass it! He would say, "I accept what you have told me, Mary; I accept it—of course I do!—because it's you." As he made this resolve a joy surged up in him as great as the previous despair. An overwhelming

joy and confidence, as when a man is winning towards, and is certain that he will attain, the thing that he wants ; he knew that his love had gone one step forward, and grown larger, in that moment.

“Come along !” Jumping up, he bent for her hand. “I am rested, and so are you. Let’s get on with the dance.”

The applause of the dancers had just commanded an encore from the band ; and in this second waltz Tony held Mary very close. The tight embrace was expressing for him something that was true. It was telling him that, though he had felt a great tenderness for her before, he had never known anything like this tenderness now.

The *Sagaman* was out in the unsheltered North Sea. It steamed along within the hollow of an upright cylinder whose wall was mist, and whose floor was a disk of tumbling waves. Rolling a little, she always carried this cylinder around her, always remained in the centre of its floor. Norway was now a long way behind the stern mist, and England was still a long way beyond the mist ahead. A head-wind wetted the decks and drove the people to shelter ; but Tony stood at the point of the bows, elbows on rail, watching the cloven water, and the lift and fall of the ship. It was good to be lonely there, and let the wind play the fool with one’s hair. One could think.

One could think : that uprush of love last night when he knew that he had accepted the altered Mary—it was very real. He had moved forward then ; and an effulgence of joy had surrounded him as he moved. But he must secure that advance. His thoughts kept throwing up this new picture of Mary with her body imperfect, and, at the sight, his love trembled and shuddered backward a little. Oh, curse the artist in him that cried for perfections ! He must escape this tyranny of the eye. He must ; and not only that he might be loyal to Mary, but because—as last night had revealed to him—if he lost his love, everything collapsed : aspiration, effort, hope, faith, and the desire to live ; and “his latter end would be worse than his beginning.” Somehow in a few months he had contrived to turn the whole of his life towards Mary, and to hitch it on to nothing else. His master-desire was

involved here; and, pent and frustrated all his life, it had crystallized out on Mary. The wreck that would follow the loss of Mary—not the loss of her person but the loss of his love for it—would be inconceivable to anyone whose driving motives were different. He, being what the past had made him, was compelled to fix the love. Ah, “fix it”!—in his mood of self-punishment, it pleased him to think that he who had wantonly determined to “fix” her love for ever, regardless of her suffering, was now compelled to fix his own, even though he paid for it with a lifetime of loneliness.

It ought to be simple. His love for her inward nature must be large enough to carry with it all outward blemishes. And it *was*. Oh, yes, yes. The “Oh, yes, yes,” began to flood him with joy, as it did last night. He would, and did, give all his worship to that sweet nature which, expanding under the touch of his love, had unfolded dearer and dearer qualities. “Even if nothing comes of all this, Tony, it *has* been, hasn’t it? and I am going to try to be worthy of what has been. I never expected this.” “Oh, but I don’t want to die! I want to live as long as you’re in the world somewhere.” Oh, Mary. . . . “I tell myself every minute of the day that, no matter what happens, I’m glad I have lived.” And then a few days ago: “I shall be thinking of you all my life, I think.” O my beloved, how can I doubt?

Mr. Leith and Father Michael were climbing over a donkey engine and coming towards him. Mr. Leith was in his thick ulster as if prepared for the winters of England, and Michael was in dark clothes as if the influence of his Southend parish were already reaching out to him. Beyond question they were coming to talk. He was their quarry; they had seen him in his comic eyrie, and scented at once a victim with whom they could toy facetiously.

“Getting the cobwebs blown away?” called Mr. Leith.

“Something like that,” answered Tony.

“He’s watching the sea go by, and thinking out his next book,” said Father Michael. “We mustn’t disturb the divine afflatus.”

(“Oh, go away, go away,” muttered Tony to himself, “and let me think.”) But he met them with a welcoming smile, anxious not to hurt them. Tony had never been able to hurt anyone easily—except those he loved.

“I’ve often wondered how you writing fellows went about

your work," announced Mr. Leith, now at his side. "How ideas come, and all that."

"Ask of the sea and sky," recommended Father Michael, pointing to these with a bland hand, "and the strong beneficent wind."

(The priceless fool!)

"Oh, I don't find ideas very difficult," said Tony. "It's sorting them out that's the trouble."

"But surely you run out of 'em pretty quickly?"

Tony stared at Mr. Leith. Presumably the gentleman was confusing ideas with plots; presumably he thought plots were the sole business of Tony's fiction.

"I don't see how I can ever run out of ideas. Everything that happens every day provides me with new ones."

"Well, that's fine," said Mr. Leith.

"For instance," Tony grinned—"you start all sorts of ideas in me. And so does Michael."

"Ha, ha!" This amused Mr. Leith, and he laughed abundantly. "I can't think what you could find to write about me," he said, just as Tony was thinking that he could make a very fine comico-pathetic story out of Mr. Leith; and out of Michael a dark tragedy. "A dull little old tale I should make. And the holy father too. Not much blood and thunder about him! No, I don't think we're very romantic old devils, do you, Sir Michael?"

Michael mumbled a negative; but it sounded formal rather than convincing, as if he secretly objected to being held unromantic.

"Darn cold here!" proclaimed Mr. Leith.

("Well, go then! For pity's sake.")

"But the weather's been good to us on the whole. In fact, this has been a darn good show from beginning to end. There's nothing like a sea-voyage, I always say. I've enjoyed every minute of it, and I guess it's done us all a power of good. Look at the father; he's ten years younger. It was a great moment when you put the idea of it into my head, sir, and I thank you for it."

Tony demurring at this praise, Mr. Leith stopped him with a "Yeah, I'll say so! It's been the best thing we've done. And now we'll have a month more in the old country; and then I and the girl'll be getting back to Canada, in time for the fall. You've never seen Canada in the fall, have you?"

"No."

"Well, you must come over and see us one day, and we'll show you what we can do in the way of autumn tints. That's where we beat the world."

Tony said that he had heard they were very fine.

Mr. Leith attempted to light a cigar, but, abandoning it because of the wind, tossed the match into the sea and turned to Michael. "I believe you're right, Father. He's in the throes of inspiration, and we mustn't disturb him. We may damage a masterpiece!"

"Yes, he's seeing visions and dreaming dreams," agreed Michael.

"Besides, it's too god-dam awful cold out here. That little old bar in the smoke-room seems a sounder proposition. What do you say?"

"If you like."

"Yeah, and perhaps the ladies'll join us there. We'll leave Genius to its own devices. It's drinking God's good air, I think. Hush! Come quietly, brother."

They had left him. Let him get back to where he was. A new Mary requiring a new love. A new Mary lesser in body but larger in nature, and she called out a different but nobler love. She did do this, did she not? Let him realize it again; let him make sure of it. Oh, yes, yes. Again the joy flooded him. And his life felt secure. The security meant a continuance of the striving to be good; and the striving to be good pointed again to the awful dilemma—but he would not think that out now. He had re-established his security: that would do for to-day.

Next morning he came quickly along the promenade deck that he might toss a glance through the windows of the lounge. An abrupt presentiment had told him that he would see Mary there, sitting alone. The room would be empty, because it was morning, and the passengers were either packing in their cabins to disembark that afternoon, or strolling the upper decks where the sun was good. Why he should believe that Mary was sitting there he could not say: the picture seemed to have projected itself unsought upon his brain like a telegraphed message.

His shock, therefore, was a queer, uneasy thing when he saw, not Mary, but Honor sitting alone in the empty lounge. Her arm rested along the back of her chair, and her face was

cupped in her hand. He stopped. Pain sat grey on Honor's face. She was a new and different Honor. She seemed at once older and younger: older than the lively youthful wife of yesterday, because sorrow had marbled her face into the tragic beauty of some universal woman; younger because, sitting there with her shoulders hunched and her round auburn head at rest upon her hand, she looked like a punished child. Perhaps Sorrow's transformation of her was not yet completed; and he was watching it pass over her. The new tragic woman was in her face, but the bewildered child was still in her body.

He guessed what had happened: Father Michael had dropped his hints in her hearing. She knew. She saw all now.

Going in to her, he asked tenderly, "My dear, you look unhappy. What's the matter?"

She started at the sight of him, and a shiver ran through her body, but she smiled back. "Oh, nothing. I've got a headache. I've been sitting in the cabin, but I suddenly felt that I couldn't stand it any longer. I wanted something larger."

"But why a headache?"

"I don't know. Tired, I expect."

"You've enjoyed the trip, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes. . . . Yes, of course. Up to a point."

"Anything worrying you?"

"No, silly. What should worry me?"

"Try a walk in the air."

"No, thanks; there are too many people about. They'll want to talk."

Well. . . . If Honor really had a headache, she had conveyed it at a touch to Tony. Defeated thought lay like a heavy iron arrow-head between his temples. "O God in Heaven, lessen their suffering, no matter what happens to me. O God, have *I* done this to them both? Could I have avoided it?" He must go out—back to the bows and get the caress of the wind on his weighted head. And there, once and for all, he must solve his dilemma and learn his course, before the ship touched port.

Two minutes later he was back in the bows, and looking towards the horizon above which the coast of England would lift very soon.

A new Mary, a new Honor, and a new self: all this had happened between port and port. Very well then: if he was

a new self, let him go into the merciless daylight of reason and not recoil if the decision he found there punished him cruelly. They only should matter now.

Quickly it grew simple. Mary would not take him while Honor loved him; she was not built that way. And he would not go seeking his own joy, while Honor loved him; not now. He would stay with her—but out of his strength now; not out of his weakness. Then it was only a question whether Mary and he should part at once, or enjoy a few more happy days together, before she returned to Canada. Instantly the thought leapt, “I ought to see more of her if I am to fix her love for ever.” But no, he had done with that idea now. Rather must he do what he could to stop the love rooting too deep, so that it might heal one day. If he withdrew at once, there might be some chance of her love healing—healing enough for her to marry another man, and be very happy.

It was a terrible thought, this thought of Mary’s love healing and turning to another man, but he must take it. And, in taking it, there was a compensating joy in believing that his own love was one stage further. With a stinging pain across the eyes and a squaring of the mouth, he accepted it; and now let his brain close on what it really meant.

He was never to see Mary any more. “Nevermore.” Strange to be nearly forty—and to be realizing for the first time the full meaning of the word. To have read stories that described a parting for ever; to have enjoyed an easy sorrow, when quoting such lines as, “Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand”; to have heard of bereavements and the prostration of the bereaved, and yet to have entered, only in this hour, as he stood in the bows of a ship with the wind assaulting his hair, into the full meaning of the word “nevermore.” He who had thought more than most men about the loneliness of all living people and the transience of all human meeting; he who had felt these things deeply enough to write books and poems about them—that he should only be suffering now the full blow of the word they carried with them, “nevermore”! But one did not really take the full blow of it; one never could. One did not enter into its innermost heart. No; one’s brain stood back from it, and stared at it, but did not go in. It had an atmosphere that one could not breathe.

“Not again in this life.” They would have one last day together in England, because they could not say good-bye

on this ship ; and he would part from her somewhere, and watch her figure disappear, and then see it no more.

“ O God, have mercy. . . . ”

Some time later he came away from the windy bows and walked back to the promenade deck. He was hardly suffering then, because his brain was mercifully dulled at the point of suffering ; it played, automatically, on all other subjects that fell beneath its notice, but ceased to work when it turned and fronted the unbearable thought. The agony pierced momentarily, in the next few hours, if he saw the figure of Mary, or heard her voice, or heard mention of her name. He found a dull narcotic in packing his cases and doing what he could to help the others.

By early afternoon the *Sagaman* was close to England, and the people were crowding to gaze at her low hills. Mr. Leith and Father Michael were among them, in overcoats and with slung cameras ; but they were taking no photographs of the grey harbour approaching. Honor stood near them, silent and abstracted in her fur coat, but ready to show laughter, if it was asked. Mary was not there, for she was lying below : the thoughts which, throughout the voyage, she had imprisoned behind walls of gaiety, had exacted their ransom at last ; they had overthrown her body, and she lay in her cabin, feverish and sick. Peggy, as might be imagined, was down below too, sitting with Mary, and ministering to her.

And so, with Honor suspecting all things, Mary torn with thought, and Tony facing his ultimate certainties, the *Sagaman* bore into port.

CHAPTER IX

HOME AGAIN

TONY opened the door of his Thamesmouth home, and Honor passed in before him. The hall with its familiar furniture received them; and about its quiet, unknowing reception there seemed a wrongness somewhere: it was as if a flaw in the picture's glass twisted the picture faintly awry. The twist repelled one. Paston came to meet them and to take their bags and coats, and in his quiet unsuspecting welcome there rang the same jarring flaw. Honor said, "Well, here we are," but there was the ghost of a sigh in her voice. They passed into his study, and neither said anything to the other. Unspoken thoughts had sat between them all their journey home, marring their talk with artificiality or dulling it to silence; and now the same thoughts had entered with them into the house. It was nine o'clock of an August night, and cold.

"Do you know," said Honor, "I think I'm going straight to bed. I'm so tired."

"Of course you are," he sympathized. "Go to bed, my child."

"You won't mind?"

"No. I shall sit up for a little. In fact, I shall light a fire and smoke a pipe."

So Honor, giving him a curious cold kiss, went quietly to bed, and he, after strolling round and round the study, put a match to the fire, and drew up an easy chair. The nursing of the fire kept him from thought for a little while, but when presently it was crackling and flaring, he lay back in the chair and held the pipe in his mouth with both hands.

Now over the old arguments again. Now that Mary was out of sight, the craving for her was worse than in those first

prison-house days. Was there no road, on this side of that experience in the Romsdals Fjord, which could take him to her? In other words, was there any way of reaching her that was consistent with a resolve to do right? Yes, the road that led him away from all his past life and out to a new life with Mary could be seen as ignoble or noble: it all depended on the spirit in which he trod it. It was ignoble, if nothing but self-indulgence drove him; it could be noble, if, Honor having consented, he went along it in a spirit of courage, enterprise and creation—the creation of a human union that had always appeared to him more worth creating than anything else.

An ineffable joy, a white radiance of excitement, began to enfold him, as he projected himself further into this picture. Just supposing that Honor, by wishing him to go and be happy, lifted from him all sense of cruelty. . . .

An hour passed, and another hour: the servants creaked upstairs; Honor's steps overhead, which had seemed restless, ceased, and the house was quiet. A church clock struck, halting his ever-revolving wheels of thought, while he counted its strokes. Eleven. It was a relief when the last echo of its interruption had died away and he could resume thought.

Yes, the word lay with Honor. If she—if she said it, then one could go, and go “in one's strength, not in one's weakness.” What then? He gave himself up to delicious pictures. They would live half the year in Canada perhaps, and come to England for the spring and summer. Or they would do what Mary had often suggested; they would find that cottage which stood by a lake in Western Ontario, and there they would spend the summer months bathing, and camping, and paddling the birch-bark canoe by the spruce-clad islands. They might spend the fall among the crimson maples of Nova Scotia, and the winter in the warm loveliness of Vancouver Island. And he would have new country, new men, new manners to write about, instead of old humdrum stuff——

Thought was stopped again by the sound of a hesitating step on the stairs. Was someone coming down? His eyes watched the door, and its handle turned, and Honor entered, a pink dressing-gown over her night-dress and red slippers on her bare feet.

“Tony,” she began, “I'm sorry, but——”

“But what, my dear?”

“Have you anything to tell me?”

He met this with a disarming laugh. "Anything to tell you? No. Why should I?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought——"

"No, dear. You go to sleep."

But she stayed there gazing into the fire.

Uneasily he put some coals on it, and kicked them into place. When he was back in his chair he put out his hand and gathered her fingers.

"What did you mean, Honor?"

Honor's hand lay unresponsive in his.

"Tell me about Mary," she said; and she sat on the carpet and laid an arm over his knee.

As he did not answer, she said again, "Please tell me, Tony. I'd rather know."

In the battle of his thoughts, one thought stood its ground, and it had a strange face. This new Honor, with the tragic beauty, was a grand thing. As he looked down on her he did not love, but he admired and even worshipped—worshipped this statue of Sorrowing Woman that shock had so quickly sculptured out of the old childish Honor. She was changed beyond imagining. Never before had she sunk at his knee with a movement so womanly as this. And her upturned look, with its dumb resignation, its still wisdom, was a look not to be believed of Honor's round, childish face; it recalled the sculptures or the pictures of great masters.

He tried to tell her. And as he spoke he was dismayed at the tricks emotions played on him. He had to fight a cruelty all the time. He had to fight a desire to set the splendour of Mary's response and the warmth of her embraces against the poverty of Honor's, though at every mention of such things he felt Honor's body shiver under his arm. He had to damp out a glow of triumph.

"You see, Honor dear, when I decided to go on with Mary"—she shivered again—"I knew of course that it must hurt you, but I did not think that it would hurt you unbearably, because I believed it was only affection you felt for me, and not love."

"What did you mean by 'going on'?" she asked.

"At one time I had decided that, if she would take me, I would marry her."

"Oh!"

It was a cry just breathed; and he felt the tremble that rushed

down her body. In a spasm of pity he uttered words whose finality dulled his heart.

"But I'm not going to do it, my dear. You mustn't worry; it's all over. I want to see her once more to say good-bye, and that is all. And don't think there's something very noble in this"—he smiled as he stroked her shoulders—"because there isn't! She would never consent, if I tried to make her."

Honor did not answer. She sat there, staring into the fire, and ever and again her body shivered. The fire burned down, but he made no move to restore it; not liking to disturb her or to take his arm from her shoulder.

"So everything will be as it was before," he said at last.

"Oh, but I don't know that it ought to be," she answered. "I can't grasp it, Tony. I know that sometimes, when you've been angry, you've talked of something like this happening, but I never imagined that it would . . . nor that I should mind so terribly as I do. . . . Oh, Tony, I am stupid, I suppose, and shallow, but I have loved you in my way; I don't think I ever knew how much till this moment. You must help me. You must help me an awful lot. All I know is that I want to do what is best for you."

At this he drew her closer for a minute, admiration and pity mingling.

Suddenly she stood up. "I must go. . . . I'd better be alone with it. Good night, my dear."

"Good night, Honor. And you're not angry with her, are you? Everything, from beginning to end, has been my fault. You've no blame for her, have you?"

"No. . . . No, I don't think so. . . . I think I blame myself."

"No, no, my dear——"

"Oh, yes. Yes, I'm beginning to see." Her voice broke towards sobs, and she said quickly: "But there! I can't talk about it any more. I must be alone. Good night, Tony."

Her shoulders shaking a little, but controlled, she hurried from the room.

"I want to do what is best for you." This sentence, echoing after she had gone, bathed his brain in an atmosphere of hope, and he forgot Honor in the visions that rose upon this air. He could not move from his chair, they drugged him so. Sometimes he felt ashamed that Honor should be in misery upstairs while he was luxuriating in these happy dreams, but

the thought was hardly fashioned before it was lost. He heard a single stroke from the church clock, and later two strokes ; and still he sat dreaming on. They would travel over the world together—what joy to take Mary and show her wonderful places ! They would share a state-room in an India-bound ship . . . a drawing-room in a Californian train . . . a tent on a Persian upland. They would have a *pied-à-terre* in Montreal . . . or Paris . . . or London, and there she would sit at his feet while he read his books, his fingers playing with her hair. And there might be a child. The wonder of having a child of Mary's ! . . .

This time he did not hear Honor's step on the stairs. It was the opening of the door which startled him. She came into the room, still wearing her pink dressing-gown and her red slippers. Her face was white and drawn, and he looked at her in alarm. She threw herself on her knees at his side and sobbed, "Oh, I can't bear it. Help me, Tony, help me. I've tried to think of giving you up, and living all alone for the rest of my life, but I can't face it. Not yet. . . . You must help me."

Tony, gently patting her head to comfort her, watched the visions disperse.

"If I have to give you up, Tony, I'll try to, but I don't see how I can. I don't think I'm strong enough. You'll have to help me all you can."

("You can never ask it of her," sighed an independent voice within him. "No, it cannot be.")

"Oh, Tony, think what it'll mean to me. I shall be all alone for ever. I did love you once, whether as much as you ought to have been loved, I don't know—you're so good, so good !—but I do now—I know I do !—I love you as much as anyone can, and I know I shall never want anyone else. Oh, my dearest ! . . . And no one will want me, I am thirty-six now. And oh, if I haven't loved you properly, I've been so proud of you, and now it'll all be hers. You and she will be happy together, and I—I shall have to live to be old—and it seems such a long time."

("No, it cannot be," said the inward voice. "Never. Never.")

"Tony, it can't be going to happen. Think of that day on the river, the first day we spent together, and how you kissed me and said, 'I don't like you, Honor ; I love you'—do you

remember that? And listen: do you remember those days in the Isle of Wight, when we used to go for walks together on Afton Down, and Jill used to make excuses for being with Daddy so that you and I could be alone; and oh, Tony, that night at Kruger's Grave when—when we told each other, and we kissed for such a long time, and walked home together almost frightened; and then those days making all our preparations, and going to see old Mr. Peidestros, what fun they were; and then getting married with nobody knowing, and driving to Albourne, where old Mrs. Fyfold was in the cottage waiting for us; and all those early days at Sheep's Eye before the war, when we were so happy——”

“So happy? Ah, poor child, if you only knew!”

“And then when you were at the war and used to write me such lovely letters, all love and longing to get back—I've got them all, Tony, in a box upstairs, and I shall never dare look at them now—and that time you came on leave, how wonderful it was—Tony, I didn't fail you then, did I——?”

“Only a little then. Just a little. But you didn't understand.”

“I wanted you then; it was lovely to have you back. And then when you were in hospital wounded, and I used to come to see you, and I was so proud of you, thinking that the nurses would know that you were mine—though I never said so to you, I was too shy—and oh, I can see that I've been careless and slack since, and terribly stupid, and I'm so sorry, I must have been so dull for you!—but I feel so different now! I know that I want you more than anything else in the world, and that I want to look after you and do everything for you, and to give you everything. *She* can't want it more——”

Again Tony had a sense of the completeness of Honor's transformation. She was a complete woman now, whose brain and lips might speak of setting him free, but whose unconscious arts would throw out every appeal to hold him.

“I've been thinking of what it'll be like after you've gone, and it stuns me to think of it. Think of the furniture we chose together, and the chairs where you used to sit, and the shelves that held all your books. Think of my going to the drawers where your old clothes used to be. Think of my going to places where we have been together—oh, it's too awful! I could never go near any of them. I should have to go right away and be alone somewhere. I couldn't go to Father and

Mother, or to friends, or to anyone I've known—I don't want any of them, I only want you. Think of my reading about you in the papers. Think of my hearing people speak about you and your books. Think of my hearing that you were ill or dying—oh, I want to do what is best for you, but it's so awful, it's so difficult. Tony, it's crushing; it's so awful not to be wanted, help me to bear it. You and she have each other. I have no one."

"It's all right, my dear. It'll be as I told you earlier to-night. The future is yours—I see that clearly."

"Oh, but Tony, I must try to let you go to her, if it is right."

"No, no, my dear. That's over. That's all over. Go now and try to sleep."

"Oh, but I don't know——"

"Yes, dear. I have decided. It's quite, quite certain."

"But, Tony, you must be happy."

"We will both be happy. Go now and try to sleep."

When she was gone, he stood up and rested his hand on the mantelshelf. "Yes, it's over," he said. He lifted his eyes from the fender to the book-lined wall, which he did not see. Many times his head shook as, one by one, he stared at all the hopes, and denied them.

Two hours later he was still standing there.

CHAPTER X

PASS, FRIEND ; ALL'S WELL

DURING one of their long silences Tony considered the contrast between the two rooms. How different from his familiar study, where Honor had sat at his feet, was this large hotel-room, where Mary sat in an attitude almost exactly the same, her arm along his knees. His own book-lined study, untidy, personal and friendly as an old suit ; and this hired sitting-room, luxurious and characterless and indifferent ! A field of buff carpet, a long sideboard with limbs tenuous and ornate, an oval dining-table, lofty windows with long curtains and pelmets of velvet, a long wide sofa before the fireplace, and two broad easy chairs. His study, except for its four walls, would depart with him ; this room would be here to-morrow, and the day after, and next year, receiving its strangers and dismissing them when the bill was paid. It was as impersonal as the earth, which keeps its furniture to itself, and its soul to itself, though men come for a night or two, and then other men after them, and make a little untidiness, and go after paying the bill.

It was an expensive room, with a bedchamber as spacious and golden opening off it ; and to-morrow, perhaps, one of your hard-headed merchants would take it and interview his clients here, without caring what had happened within its walls the previous night ; and next week a large, square American and his wife would dump their "grips" in it—or say a Canadian and his lady who would know nothing of a daughter of Canada here before them. Himself, for instance, had he till this moment given a thought to those who had occupied the room before him ? Perhaps other couples had come here for a night or two, and made illusion real. Surely they had.

Far below the windows, at the base of this great honeycomb, the traffic of London hummed and purred; and the sound reminded him of the view he had gazed at but a few minutes before, when, the waiter removing the tea-things, it was wise to stand apart from Mary. He had seen a pale blue sky arching over London, and a low sun striking the upper stories of the buildings with a primrose light. Under the shafts of the sun, and far down in a road like a canyon's bed, red omnibuses and taxi-cabs and motor-vans streamed their two ways; while, to the right, in the middle of a London square, a quiet garden slept under plane trees. The bark of the plane trees was peeling into the bark of silver birches, and their leaves were old.

Because it was September now. Mary had written that their last day together must be very happy, so they had better wait till her father was out of town on his visit to Edinburgh, and then she would be able to remain with him till the last possible hour. "This is deceitful, I suppose, but I don't want our last few hours to be spoiled by anxiety, either ours or his, the dear soul! Oh, I think it's marvellous of Honor to let you come and see me once more. I think she's so good. It's funny, but I love her. Of course, Tony dear, it could never have been. At the back of my mind I knew it all along, but at first I couldn't bear to admit it. I can't now, if it comes to that!! Oh Mary Mary, grow up! . . ."

A September evening and getting cold; and the waiter, after bearing aloft and away his tray of standardized tea-things, had returned and lit the fire for them. "That'll be cosier, I think, madam." Its flames were dancing before their eyes now, but it did not seem a friendly fire; it remained of a piece with the room; reserved, non-committal, belonging to itself and not to them. It cast its warmth over Tony's knees and Mary's silk stockings, but less by grace of a good heart than by the way.

After listening to its low roar Mary spoke.

"Tell me about when you were little," she said.

He picked up her hand and played with it. "Why?"

"Because I know hardly anything about you, really, and this is my last chance. Tell me as much as you can."

So he talked of that old and different London, thirty years in the past, where the buildings were lower and greyer and the horses possessed the streets; and of that untidy vicarage in

Kensington where the Family had lived and made merry—not without offence to the neighbours——

“How many of you? Let me have you all.”

Father, Mother, and five offending children, Keatings, Joyce, Derek, Peggy and himself——

“Give me exact descriptions, please. Of all.”

He tried to give her these. He showed her Keatings' quiet cynicism and Derek's comic pomposity, both of which were cancelled now, under the soil of France; and Joyce's vivacity which she had carried away to India; and Peggy's frequent conversions to godliness and backslidings into sin; and his own absurdity when as a prep-school boy of eleven he had fallen in love with little Wavers (but here she shook her head); and about Freshwater and Grandelmere and St. Paul's. “I wasn't eighteen then, and you weren't born. Child, I hate to think there was a time when I was alive and you were not!”

Mary nodded.

“And as for the next twenty years, when you were alive and I hadn't met you, I can only express what I feel about them by saying that they are a permanent object of commiseration.”

She nodded again, and vigorously.

“And now tell me all about the war. Right through, please. I want to try to see you in it.”

Gallipoli—Sinai—France. Colonel Tappiter, Padre Quickshaw, dear old Hughes Anson, and Moulden, less dear. The attack at Passchendaele, the Great Retreat of March, 1918, and the fight in Grandpré, when the machine-gun caught him in head and breast—and here she shivered as if it had just hit her, and her fingers pressed his knee.

“The spring of 1918. Let's see: at that time I was a twelve-year-old schoolgirl in New York, and thinking of nothing but a mistress with whom I was very much in love. Isn't it all extraordinary? I feel I ought to have felt that wound, but I didn't. I'm sorry. It was very remiss of me, I'm sure, but I didn't.”

Reminiscence had drunk up two hours, and the fire was low. He got up and replenished it and said, “Come, we'll go downstairs and get you some dinner.”

“Oh, must we?” she protested. “It's getting so late, and we've so little time.”

“We won't stay long. But a little bottle of Pommard nicely

warmed—or, no, we'll have a Moët and Chandon Dry Imperial to-night—come along, Mary."

The vast dining-room was crowded, and all eyes studied them as they walked between the tables to a distant corner. Tony felt very proud of Mary and hoped the people would think her his young wife, and envy him. And when they were seated at their table and he was staring at her profile—she looking around at the other guests—he received again that sense that she was older. Not her looks, but her quality, had grown older. Merrily, but gently, he told her so: something had matured her like the wine, only it had done it in a day.

"It's been rather an intensive method," she began, in a laughing reply—but to this they gave a silence and left the subject.

Their meal was very short, both being impatient to return to the solitude upstairs; and they were soon threading their way between the tables to the doors, the eyes of tardier diners following them. When they were back in the sitting-room, they found that a maid had tended the fire, which was blazing up the chimney. They resumed their former positions before it, he in the corner of the sofa, she at his feet with an arm along his knee. Thoughtfulness held them till Mary, looking up, said one of those odd, surprising things that seemed to belong to women alone, and to this new Mary more than many women. Often in these later days she had said them, and always, in some strange way, they seemed of better quality than anything he could have said. They saddened him because they hinted at the undiscovered country in Mary which he would never find now and till for himself.

"Tell me about all your faults," she said.

He begged to know why she should ask such unpleasant news.

"Never mind why. Tell me them all—every one you can think of."

He dealt with his character—but it was rather his character before that hour in the Romsdals Fjord. He mentioned an egotism which, despite all fine theories, drove him ever towards his own ends; he said that all his theories looked one way and all his temperament another; he would have liked to love everybody and go about serving them, as Peggy did, but instead he was intolerant of them and impatient

with them, and burned always to escape from their talk to his own pursuits ; he would have liked to be able to listen to people's worries and to give them sympathy and help, but he very seldom could—after five minutes of their talk, he was hardly listening to them but thinking his own thoughts ; sadder still, he would have liked to give himself wholly to one person, but he didn't seem able to do so—pride and vanity held him back ; his real desire was to possess this person like a slave and not to give the whole of himself in return ; and all this meant that he was now a bookworm creeping away always to a shut room and an easy chair—an unsociable, irritable, lonely egotist.

Mary had listened with her face to the fire, and after a pause she said, " Yes, I could have managed all that."

Two hours passed ; two hours of talk and embraces, and then he looked at the watch on his wrist, but she clapped a hand over it.

" No, don't look at that. Don't look at that."

And for another hour they sat together without speaking. Then, with a sigh, he glanced at the watch again.

" It's nearly time, my child."

" Yes."

" Almost midnight."

" Yes, I must go."

Pressing his hand once, she rose and turned towards the chair where her coat lay and her handbag. " You stay here, Tony, will you ? I would rather go alone."

" All right, Mary."

He helped her into her coat, and straightened it for her, and she smiled her thanks. They held each other for a long kiss ; and then, after one more pressure of his hand, she walked towards the door.

" Mary ! "

Turning round, she at once came back and put her arms around his neck.

" Mary, stay a little longer."

" It's so late, Tony."

" Just sit here with me a little longer. What on earth are day and night ? You would stay with me if it were still day."

" Of course I would."

" Then let me just hold you for a few hours more. Let me have as much of you as I can. It's such a long time ahead."

She hesitated, and then began to remove her coat. He helped her, and when she had laid her outdoor things aside and was ready, they sank to the sofa again. Here he held her nearly all the night. Towards morning, however, he let her lie full length and sleep for a little, while he sat on the floor with an elbow on the sofa near her feet.

"It's five o'clock, Mary."

She turned, awoke, and smiled.

"Is it? Ah, I must slip away now before anyone is about. I'll go quickly."

"Listen, Mary." Still seated where he was, he took the hand with which she had been ordering her hair, and said, "I have been thinking during the night, and I want you to say one or two things to me before you go."

"What are they, Tony?"

"Tell me—tell me first that you know that I have loved you, as I have never loved anyone else, and never shall."

"Yes, I think I know it."

"Then tell me that, though I must have brought pain to you, you have had more joy out of me than pain. Tell me this, so that I may endure the thought that I have hurt you."

"Oh, much, much more joy."

"Then tell me that you are going to be happy—yes, very happy, because one man in the world will be thinking of you always. Surely that will make you happy, and keep you happy."

"Dear, one part of me is gloriously happy now."

He stood up, and lifted her to her feet and held her by the shoulders.

"Then tell me—I am a fool, Mary, but I do so want you to say this: tell me that you will somehow be richer because of me."

"My dear, do you think that I would have missed you?"

"No, but promise me—oh, I'm a fool, but I can't *bear* the thought of anything else—that from this time onward you will set about making all this work for good in your life—and nothing else. Then I shall have helped you, and not hurt you."

"Tony, can't you *see* that that is what will happen. Can't you *see*?"

He bent and kissed her.

"Good-bye, Mary."

"Good-bye, dear one; and thank you."

There was no more. When she was dressed to go, she

reached for his hand, held it for a moment in both of hers, and went quickly.

Tony looked at his fingers, and then around the room : Mary was not in it ; that was all. She was gone, as all the others had gone. And if one went to the door and looked along the carpeted corridor, one would not see her figure now.

Pass, friend ; all's well.

PART IV

CHAPTER I

THE LEGACY

AND there it might be supposed the story of Mary Leith and Antony O'Grogan ended. But not yet. Mary was gone, but all Tony's emotions of the past months had now to flower into a dark experience before the story reached stability and a close. What subconscious forces commanded this experience in consciousness, what violent conflict between the old character and the new, before the new could conquer and occupy, he was not to know for many a day; if ever fully to understand.

This dark flowering began within an hour of Mary's going. Tony was very tired and went into the bedroom and flung himself on the bed, face downward and forehead resting on his arm. But even as he did so, he saw, with dismay, that the action was partly histrionic; he had felt as if he ought to do something like that. This frightened him into turning an inward eye on his real feelings, and honesty compelled him to admit that he was feeling nothing worthy of the dignity of the occasion. Instantly an ache of despair, incredibly painful, like a wound in his thinking, cried out: "O Mary! . . ." It sank and settled, and he told himself, "I must be numbed; that is all."

But what was this? There was more than an absence of misery. Flashing and flashing again—yes, undeniably—came a feeling of relief.

"No!"

But it was so. Relief that a strain was over. "If Mary were to come back"—for a second, and it was the most terrible second of all—it was that touch of hell again within which he had sat when she told him of her built-up shoe—he believed that he did not want her to come back.

“ Mary, it’s not true ! ”

For an hour he lay on that bed in an agony of defeated, confounded thought. A sense of loss sickened him ; it dried his mouth and turned his head to flint ; but it was loss of his love, not loss of Mary. The September morning was cold, and he put himself under the heavy bed-clothes that the chilling of his body might not distract him from thought. Come : he must suffer the true suffering, the real bereavement ; not this lie. But it was useless. He could feel nothing, nor could he believe, for the moment, that he wanted to see Mary again. Oh, this was awful ! He hurled off the bed-clothes, and went into the sitting-room to remind himself of her ; but his heart gave no response to the furniture of the room. From the floor in front of the sofa, he picked up a tiny waved hair-pin—one of those that fixed the ringlets round her ears—and he looked at it, but it did nothing for him. In tearless despair, after putting the hair-pin in a waistcoat pocket, he fell on his knees before the sofa, laid an arm along the place where she had lain, and prayed a prayer more real than any he had uttered in all his years of priestcraft : “ O God, give me back my love.”

Soon his love was back again with a rush ; and misery came because he had lost her ; and, with it, happiness because it meant that his love was secure.

He rose, and, whistling absently between his teeth, returned to the bedroom, replaced a few articles in his bag, shut it sharply, and went out through the bedroom door. He could not face the sitting-room again. Walking rapidly, but with no apprehension of the people and the traffic in the streets, he arrived at Fenchurch Street Station, found his train for Thamesmouth, and sat his body in an empty carriage. And there, during the hour’s run to the East, he just stared in front of him, his jaw slightly dropping. At Thamesmouth he stepped out on to the platform and, to his alarm, reeled ; he tried to walk a few paces and he swayed. It was as if the balance-control of his brain was injured, and he was compelled to stand quite still for a few seconds while he mastered it. Then he walked up the familiar hill to his home. People greeted him, and he answered them gaily, and they suspected nothing.

At home, in his study, he put away everything that could remind him of her—her letters, a pocket-case she had given him, the hair-pin. He put these things in a strong box ; and before he shut down the lid a paroxysm of sobbing shook and

doubled his frame. Tears made him happy because they gave the lie to those thoughts on the hotel bed. "Ah, good; there was nothing in all that." He lifted out the packet of letters again, kissed it, and laid it back in the box. Then he shut and locked the lid.

The walls of silence were around him for a lifetime now.

Next day the enemy attacked again. He was walking along the sea-front; he had talked merrily with parishioners he had met; and now there was a stretch of pavement along which he could think of her. And suddenly his brain threw up a picture of her as he had seen her that day leaving the beech-wood, with her shoulders rounded and her face turned away from him. *And he did not love her in that guise.* At once the sickening sense of loss, the dried mouth, the tautened cheeks, the flinty head.

He stopped still. Here was some poison that must be got at. Why these awful moments when he almost disliked her, and the horror of despair that followed them? Was it that he had been torn by the emotions of the last months, and the harrowed ground was ready to come alive with fears? Or was it that the old character, which didn't want anything imperfect, which didn't want to make sacrifices, was shooting these ghastly shots at the new? The awful moments he could not explain with any certainty as yet; but the horror of despair that followed them was easy to understand. He had contrived, for good or ill, to orientate the whole of his life towards this Mary Leith—to make her, as it were, his magnetic north—and if she failed him, everything collapsed.

Yes, that was it—his fist clenched as he stood still on the pavement—he was compelled to go on slaying the old character that this orientation might hold. He was compelled to continue that steady disciplining of himself that he had begun in the Romsdals Fjord. Strange! He was never to go to Mary, and yet he must continue training himself as though this were his goal.

And thereafter this self-disciplining, if it was nothing else, was a happy game of "make-believe," enabling him to endure. It became, perhaps, the one sure delight of his life. An exhilarating exercise! Drill out every fault that fettered him

from loving people. Those walls of self-content behind which he fled from other people, he must unbuild them and come out to the people, lest, if he went to Mary—what was he saying?—he should sometimes be irked by her and want to escape. His absorption in writing and hopes of fame, he must allow this no more than a share of his life; he must practise ministration to other men's hopes and needs. That vanity which would come close and whisper, "Listen, you are Somebody Esquire, and she was altogether too small for you," it should be slain on the threshold; and slain it was, with the answer, "*I am not yet worthy of her, but, by God! I am going to be.*" That hardness and cruelty in him, if any of it was left, it should be drilled out: he must be gentle, for instance, with Honor, and love her—for love of Mary; he must hide his pains from her and appear lively that she might think he was recovering from his infatuation, and be happy again. All his irritability and impatience with people's silliness, these must go too, lest, if he went to Mary—ah, that picture again!—he should ever be chafed by her whims and her weaknesses. And meanness: your meanness injured yourself more than your friends, because it injured your power to love them. To whom you gave, him you loved. Daily Tony practised generosity, that one day he might be able to love Mary aright. And inertia. Of late, middle-age had driven him to arm-chair and book, while the wind was still on the hills—this slothfulness dropped from him in a day. Daily, on rising and before sleeping, he did physical exercises (in secret) that he might keep himself vigorous and young for Mary, if ever—— He stood no nonsense with himself, if adventure called from the woods outside. He went out to look for it—or to look for the power to love Mary better.

But each day, and many times a day, the enemy attacked. And always with a weapon of one pattern. It threw up into Tony's consciousness some mannerism of hers, some gesture, or some tone of her voice that he imagined now he did not like; and for a second he was repelled by her. And he stood, dismayed. Then the enemy whispered: "Perhaps it was all illusion. Consider: you craved to love someone, and you determined to fit into your craving the first pretty girl who would respond to you; did you not? Do you remember those early days when you doubted, but determined to go on with an adventure, no matter how she might suffer? Do you remember that day

when you saw your Vicar, heavy and coarse and old, and said to yourself, 'Yes, I am going on. This may be my last chance'? Was that love? Do you remember that day in the beechwood when, after taking your glut of kisses, you found her less lovely and thought 'I will enjoy her for a little, and then lose her'?"

Sick, his heart pulsing at all speeds, his head wooden, his mouth dry, he stared at these too cogent thoughts, and all his being cried out, "No! I loved you, Mary."

Surely, surely: he had begun all wrong perhaps, but he had loved her in the end. Come, memory; show me the times when I loved her passionately. Memory showed them—many, many of them—and he soared triumphantly away from the hateful foe.

For some hours after he would be secure and happy; then, suddenly, he was staring into the enemy's face again, with his heart irregular, his head wooden, and his stomach sick.

It was in church: he was standing in his stall, while the hymn before the sermon was sung, but he was not seeing the choir-boys in front of him, nor the lake of faces down in the nave, nor Canon Broadley at prayer before he preached; all this had hazed out and he was staring at the enemy who whispered:

"Tell me: are you not terrified of meeting her now, lest one of these mannerisms should shiver your nerves and prove my word, 'Illusion'?"

Terribly true it sounded, but he would not answer "Yes."
"You know it; you know it," persisted the enemy. "You know you would rather see nothing of her than risk such moments. And think: they would recur and recur; your very fear of them would create them. See! you are terrified of meeting her now."

"No," answered the breaking Tony. "Only till I feel well again. Only till I'm healed of all this."

"You will never be healed of it. You want her as a perfect dream, and you will always dread going to her, because in your heart of hearts you believe she would fail the dream."

"It's a lie!" he cried. "Or if it's not, I'll shrink my dream till she can fit it. But it's not true. I love her, and no figment. I am just frightening myself; that is all. I am ill and worn-out, and at the mercy of an over-subtle brain. You are torturing me unnecessarily——"

To escape, he turned his face towards the dense congregation, and far away at the back of the church he saw a face like hers under a hat like hers—he was always seeing these faces—and straightway a mist of longing saturated him; and he was safe again.

“There!” he cried. “I *do* want to meet her again. I dream of little else. There is a real I behind this sickly wrangler, and it shows itself in moments like this.”

“Or is it the dreamer that shows itself?” asked the foe—and the argument was going round again; round and round; Tony standing still as death in his choir-stall, while the hymn went on.

The hymn was over, and Canon Broadley was in the pulpit, saying an Invocation. Congregation and choir sank to their seats, and the light dimmed. Tony, in the surplice and stole of his priesthood, leaned back in his stall with fingers locked round his knee, thinking—thinking—while the Canon’s voice rambled on. “Oh, but I don’t want to die! I want to live so long as you’re somewhere in the world!” How bright her eyes were then. He could see them sparkling now. “I tell myself every minute of the day that I’m glad I have lived. . . .” “I never expected this. . . .” “I shall be thinking of you all my life, I think.” Mary, my beloved!

In Heaven’s name, how could it have been that, a few minutes ago, he was battling with a torment of doubt?

It was late at night, and he was sitting in his study alone. He had just defeated another assault of the enemy, and was aglow with renewed security. Sunk in his chair he was living again that last day in the hotel sitting-room and recovering, one by one, all the dear, appealing things she had said and done. And at length he came upon a picture of her drawing from her purse a little slip of paper on which she had pencilled some questions she must ask him before he was out of hearing for ever. This picture was too much: it broke him up into a spasm of sobs. “Oh, Mary, how could I ever doubt?” The tearing sobs gave him assurance, and therefore happiness, till—suddenly—he knew the enemy was before him. It just showed him Mary as less than lovely, with a shortened limb, and the spasm of weeping stopped, as if a guillotine had fallen.

"See?" said the torturer. "It is the dream-creature for whom you weep. You do not weep for the real."

"A lie, a lie!" he screamed, though nothing left his lips; and he jumped up, and stood trembling. "Her weakness only makes me love her more."

"But are you weeping now? Look hard at that shortened limb and see that she was not the creature you thought her. Now try to weep."

"But if I lost a little of my love for her body, I grew to love her nature more and more."

"Look hard at her uneven limbs——"

"But her face, her face! So lovely——!"

"Look hard at her face in moments when it droops and loses its loveliness, and try to weep. You cannot."

He could not.

"O God, what is happening to me?" He rushed out, and his body walked rapidly over the empty pavements while his brain fought the denier; nor would he turn about to go home till he had laid him low. He would break his love past this doubt that inhibited tears. He arrived in country lanes and rested against a gate. And there, seeing nothing of the meadow before him, he fixed his inner eye on that Mary whose beauty was impaired. He saw her exactly as she was—and holding that paper of questions in her hand. Pity rent him; the sobs tore through his body. He was weeping for the real Mary, and he was happy.

Exhausted, but serene, he turned to walk home.

And as he walked home, he vowed that he must stabilize this serenity. He must finish these fears once and for all, by some clear-cut statement of the truth.

"It is simple. I see what causes these fears—I think. In the beginning I was only trifling with you, Mary, whether I admitted it to myself or not. And now I am being punished for having trifled with you, careless of your hurt. My punishment for having begun with lies is that I must suffer now these hell-like moments of doubt. I deserve it. I am glad to be suffering. But I grew to love you truly, my dearest. I loved you from that hour when I resolved to overthrow my character for you. And my love went forward when it refused to be beaten by the destruction of my picture of you. And all this is teaching me that love, if it is to endure, must pass out of mere glamour and sparkle and sugared sweetness into something

sterner and stronger and dryer. It is the difference between a cheap wine, and a wine of quality ; but it is not easy to train the taste to make this change. . . . I am finding it hard. The old romantic Adam kicks as he dies."

He slept well that night and awoke to happy thoughts ; and the morning was hung with a nameless glow. So at peace was he that he could lapse into a chair, plunge his mind into a book, and escape from himself. Then—he had been reading two hours—he heard the enemy talking again. With his heart at its trickery and the nerves on his face stretching, he laid down the book and listened.

"This is what would happen," said the enemy. "Say she were yours : then, your hunger assuaged, all this agitation would die down ; and very soon you would be preferring the books of men who could give you much to the prattling of her who could give you little."

"No, but I shall overcome all that self-seeking. I shall——"

"Don't you believe it ! When all this high emotion is slaked by her presence, the driving charge will be gone, and you will quickly drop back into the old habits. You will wish her silent, or away."

Well. He stood up to do battle.

"No. I do not believe that I shall ever turn back on the road I am travelling now. That first driving charge was too powerful. The idea is fixed that I want to change my nature, so as to be able to give all to her, if ever——"

As he was thinking thus, his brain framed a sentence whose place in this context he did not at first perceive.

"She broken, or I broken, all would be well."

Distinctly his brain had said it ; what had he meant by it ? He saw what his thought had been. If Mary were to be struck down by the London traffic and confined for life to a lie-abed chair, he would know no joy like devoting the rest of his life to her. Such an external accident would enable him to take at a leap the steep hill he was climbing now. And it would be the same with her, if the accident were his. And in either case both would be perfectly happy, because not all the health in the world could weight the scales against this final amplification of one's lonely self in another person. That would be quiet ecstasy.

Sure that in this thought he had found the truth of his feeling for Mary, he was exultant again ; and he told himself that he was free at last of these morbid fears.

But no : day by day the terrible alternation went on. Bright summit and dark pit ; bright summit and dark pit ; did ever any man tread such a road of heights and chasms ? When would he stand on a flat table-land with no pits to threaten him any more ?

It passed understanding. Struggle to understand it as he might ; stand detached from himself as he would and examine every moment of his days with Mary, he could find no adequate cause for so racking a conflict ; the experience dodged and eluded analysis. It was not rational, because in the lowest pit he did not really doubt ; some part of him stood steady within and cried, "Fool ! Fool !" And over the whole experience, day after day, over the crowns and the chasms, hung a golden glow of certainty, and, trembling always in its light, the old impossible hope that somehow, some day, he would find her again. The telephone-bell could not ring without the hope leaping. If only this were some word from Mary ! God knew what word, for the hope had no source in reason. The garden gate could not click, nor the postman's letters scatter to the floor, without the hope leaping again. If only—— But there was never anything. And he took but a light blow, because he had not really expected anything ; and he returned to his seat and went on hoping.

Who could have believed that hope and despair had the same face ? One morning he heard the gate click, and, hurrying to the window with his hope, he saw the gardener planting daffodil bulbs ; and immediately thought, "Spring. . . . Mary. . . . What will spring be to me ? Nothing." All the beauty of the earth stirred the same quick response—the hills lifting out of the smoke of December mists, an evening sky of green and aquamarine, the first crocuses lighting the winter gardens—all pierced him with the same emotion, and it was both a poignant joy of hope and a poignant sense of loss.

Remorse. For the first time in his life he knew the full torment of remorse. One evening he was walking in a street of villas, and calling on reason to destroy one of the visiting fears. The rain poured down ; it quickened to beating ; but he strode on with his problem, vowing "I'll halt nowhere, till I've solved this. Oh, Reason, help me out of this." Reason

obeyed almost too well. Flashing its white light, it showed him, not only the foolishness of his fear but also the foolishness of his hope, and in that dreadful moment of conviction he endured a black, unspeakable despair. Out of this despair the thought sprang, "Does *she* have moments like this?"

"O God, no!" Catching her pain, he cried for it to be removed. "O God, don't let *her* suffer like this. She came all joy to England—sailing down her beloved Gulf of St. Lawrence—and I took her and gave her this. . . . O God, I can't bear it. . . . Give me her share of the pain. Give me all of it. Let her forget me, and be happy. Anything—anything, rather than that she should suffer like this. Ah give me something that I can *do* for her. . . . O God of mercy, I will never be cruel to anyone again. . . ."

This cry came so surely from the profoundest depths of him that lo! it carried its proof of the completeness of his love, and at once he was exultant with happiness.

This, then, was the end of fear. He could doubt no more. What folly it had all been! He was on the table-land at last, and he walked there with a singing heart and an elated step. A woman of figure more perfect than Mary's passed him—and he had pitched. Down and down he fell. The enemy had sprung up and shown him Mary's figure with its shortened limb. Here were the headache, the tightening of the facial nerves, the sick-pulsing heart. The thought that he could contrast another woman with Mary, and sicken, poisoned all his confidence. Oh, it was useless, useless. This neurosis in his loving was there for ever. He could fight no more; he would give it all up. It was over. "Good-bye, Mary. I loved you, but not enough. Oh, my darling! . . . I am deserting you now, but I am done for."

For the fraction of a second he experienced relief; and the fact that he could know relief, though only for a pin-prick of time, plunged him deeper into the abyss. He must escape from the pavements, and the mocking twilight, for his mouth was working for tears. "Oh, Mary, I have given you up. My love for you has gone, as my love for everyone has always gone. Oh, Mary, my beloved, what am I to do?"

He hurried away with his misery around him like a cloak. Whither? Custom drove him towards St. Wilfrid's Road; he was on its wet pavements and saw the lofty arc of his own church. He hurried on. "Oh, Mary, I cannot endure this

thought of not loving you. This recession of love kills me. What does it mean?" He turned on to the asphalt yard between the Tin Room and the church's southern wall; and pushing open the south door, he hurried through and left it to swing to and fro behind him. The church was almost dark, but he passed the light-switches without a thought for them. It was loneliness in a large place that he wanted; not light. Now he was pacing the tiled floor from transept to transept—back and forth, back and forth—between the pews of the nave and the steps of the chancel. His sweetest belief and his sweetest hope were dead. He had believed that he loved; it was a delusion. He had hoped that some day they might be together; he did not want it now—he would be terrified of it—every mannerism of hers, every gesture and action that he did not wholly like would start this torture into life again and he would be fretted into a hate of her. He might even touch the fringe of madness, and, in his torment, strike her.

"Oh, Mary, no! I'll not come to you to hurt you. It's over. . . ."

"Oh, no. Not over. I can't bear the thought. I *don't* believe my love was delusion, but if it was, I'll make it real! Even though I fight against reason and destroy it. What care I for sanity without my love of Mary? 'Delusion'? God, it's laughable to use such words of what I felt for Mary! . . . I know, I *know* that I loved her as I loved nothing else in the world. It's all so strange: I have but to affirm this love, to doubt it; I have but to deny it, to know the denial a lie. What am I to do?"

Dazed, he staggered up the chancel to the altar rails and fell to his knees on the communicants' step. He pressed his face into his hands. "O God, give me back my love."

It was the place where, years before, he had prayed to God to enable him to be a good priest.

CHAPTER II

DIOCESAN CONFERENCE

A MORNING of sunlight heightened by the brilliant sea ; and all the clergy of Coleborough Diocese were converging upon Thamesmouth, and all the roads of Thamesmouth were but different routes to the Parish Church. The Diocesan Conference was calling the clergy first to a solemn service in St. Wilfrid's and then to their deliberations (which might God direct and rule) in the Large Concert Hall of the Kursaal, Thamesmouth. Alone, in pairs, in twos and threes, the black-coated clergy were filtering out of the station and down the High Street ; and the gapers on the pavements turned and stared after them.

"J'ever see so many of them at one go?" a man in a muffler, standing at a corner, was heard to ask of his companion.

"No," answered the companion, and left the matter there not anxious to understand it.

"One can see where our taxes go," mused the man in the muffler.

Shop-girls, apprised of an abnormal development in the street outside, came to their doors or their upper windows to study the passing of these good men, and, absurdly, to giggle. Why to giggle? Granted that these ecclesiastical visitors were of every pattern, but that should not be so very amusing. Some were clearly "ministers," and they were soft-skinned men, with moustaches and white ties, who carried umbrellas delicately ; others were clearly "priests," and they were either very fat or very lean, and always shaven, if not clean-shaven. Some of these priests wore overcoats over their cassocks, and that, perhaps, was legitimate substance for laughter. Sometimes a clergyman came along who was neither a "minister" nor a "priest," but a high dignitary in gaiters ; and he deserved a

longer gape than others, and, absurdly, a more delicious giggle. If, by chance, the legs below the apron were imperfect, the gigglers were compelled to run back into the shop, lest their amusement became uncivil. Occasionally a parson bowled by on a bicycle, and a thing which was not funny as a rule was funny this morning.

It was much the same on the sea-front, whether on the hill-road down from West Thamesmouth, or on the level road along by the eastern town. Sombre-clad clergy were hurrying towards St. Wilfrid's. But the road from the west had no loafers, while the road from the east had plenty, most of whom were leaning against the railings of the esplanade. They lolled there and lipped their "fags" or tended their teeth and were grateful for the passing of the clergy, which introduced a little variety into the morning. Joe Wylie was there with a few of his friends. He leaned against his railing and pushed back his bowler hat and thrust his hands into his pockets that he might be at ease to comment on the unusual appearance of the Thamesmouth streets.

"Wotcher think it is, George," he inquired of his neighbour.

"An outing?"

"No. They ain't dressed for an outing. They're dressed for work."

"Chrimes!" Joe drew a hand from his pocket and laid the forefinger along his loose moustache, now quite grey. "Are they going to get to work on us, d'you suppose?"

"As like as not."

"Gawd!"

"Here's one-and-a-half," said George.

The priest to whom he alluded was certainly the best thing that had so far appeared. He was a monk, whose plump contours were overhung by a black robe that, lifting in front, uncurtained his sandalled feet. His tonsure was covered with a black skull-cap, and his stomach was girdled, or suspended, by a white rope.

"Christ!" exclaimed Joe.

"No, it ain't," corrected George. "It's a ruddy monk. You can always tell 'em; they have ropes round their waists like that."

"Rahnd their waists! Ought to have 'em rahnd their necks," asserted Joe, who, like all Englishmen who never go to church, was resolved to have no popery in his services.

“ ‘Waist,’ too! Say it again! The less said about his waist the better.”

“ You’re right, Joe.”

“ Yes.” Joe watched it disappearing. “ Yes, it’d get its rosette in the Fat Stock show any day.”

George was also watching it, as the monk propelled it up the street. “ Wollops about a bit, don’t it? ”

“ Yes. Must have cost quite a lot, that waist. That’s what we pay to keep up, George, you and me.”

“ I’ll believe you.”

“ Tib ought to ’a’ seen ’im. She won’t swaller it, if I tell her I seen anything as good as that. Whenever I tell her a real first-class story, she as good as says I’m a liar.”

“ So y’are.”

“ Nah and then, perhaps. But it’s aggravatin’ not to be believed when you’re speakin’ Gawd’s truth. She’d have liked that feller—she’s always had a soft spot for the parsons. For my part, I never could abide above three of ’em. There was an old codger of hers that nearly got me converted. Tib said I ought to come along to the meetin’ and hear him, but I said, ‘ Not in these trousers, old lady.’ I said, ‘ I ain’t the sort to be taken in by his gaff. I may look a fool,’ I said, ‘ but I’m not as green as I’m cabbage-looking.’ ”

“ Aren’t you? ” queried George, as one surprised.

“ Well, I was, this time,” Joe allowed, delightedly. “ Not arf I wasn’t! I went along, jest to please her, once or twice, and lumme! the old gen’l’m’n cawfed up so much gospel at me that I got windy and let on that I was feelin’ converted. But it don’t last, summah, that sort of thing. Then there was our padre in the war. Did I ever tell you about ’im, George? Padre Quickshaw. He was a funny little cove, but The Goods, if ever a padre was. Diggin’ with the boys in No-Man’s Land, sweatin’ along with ’em on the march, spittin’ all over the front row at Church Parade, cussin’ ’em all to blazes—gaw, he was a fair treat. Did I ever tell you how he got his D.S.O. up at Passchendaele. If ever a man earned his D.S.O.—”

“ Here’s a long ’un,” interrupted George.

His head had indicated Father Michael, who, hurrying past in a tight-fitting cassock, did look exceedingly tall.

“ Gaw! ” Joe studied the whole black length of him, from his hat to his heels and from his heels up to his hat again. “ Well, he’s a sky-pilot, anyway.” He followed him with his

eyes till he ceased to be of interest. "Then there was Captain O'Grogan, up at the Parish Church. I never thought to see him a padre. He was my officer in the 15th, and a gentleman too—him and Captain Scrase." Joe, though he would never tell the tale of Kit Scrase, could never refrain from alluding to him, even if only gratuitously. "Yuss. A lot of things Captain O'Grogan and I done together. Three years we was together, and never a crawse word, as you might say. Kissin' terms, almost. And, funnily enough, we each stopped our packet the same day in the Great Retreat, March, Eighteen. . . . Of course I'd bin gassed before that, at Ee-prez, and had a touch of shell-shock, but it was not till the Great Retreat that I was properly disabled. When I heard he'd come to the Parish Church I thought I'd take to goin' regular, just for old time's sake, but I couldn't get on with it summah. Now I come to think of it, he used to try to get me to come to church in France. He must have always been religious. He used to arst me, 'Are you comin' to the Padre's service, Joe?' and I'd say, 'Me, sir? Gawd forgive yer, sir.' But I went more than once. Yes"—Joe passed his finger under both sides of his moustache because he was about to drop a very humorous remark—"I went along and sang me hymns. Sang 'em like one o'clock."

"Gawd help us," muttered George, contemplating this picture over a tooth-pick.

"Yes; sang 'em like—*Hello!*" This was a sharp exclamation from Joe. "Turn aht the guard there! Turn 'em aht! 'Ere's his lordship, the ex-Mayor!"

On the other side of the road Alderman Scrase was passing. Very dignified he looked in morning coat and tall hat, his humourless face carved by thought. He had just been down to the Kursaal to see that all things were correctly ordered and now was returning to the service in his church.

Deliberately, with exaggerated rigidity, Joe stood at attention till the ex-Mayor had passed. Then his lips squared with venom.

"Aye, that's the s—— that give me four months for fightin' a copper in the General Strike. Four months, mind you! And I could have downed him if I'd wanted to. I knew a thing or two that would have put him where I could find him any day of the week."

"What things?" asked George.

"Never you mind. I didn't do it then, and I'm not going to do it nah!—for Captain Scrase's sake, who was a gentleman. But how that old snitch and his missus ever had a son like our Captain Scrase I don't know. It beats me. But if I could bash in that tile of his, jest once——"

By this time all the clergy and all the lay members of the Conference were in the pews of St. Wilfrid's Church, making one compressed black congregation. Father Michael and Alderman Scrase were among the last to arrive, and they had difficulty in finding seats. Canon Broadley, as became the Vicar of the church, was travelling most genially up and down the aisles. He was in high fettle at this happy event in Thamesmouth, and its effect on the spiritual life of our Borough—though, to tell the truth, the Borough remained much the same after the visitation as before it.

At ten o'clock the service began. The only clergy to take their seats in the chancel were Canon Broadley, the Bishop of Coleborough, and the curate of St. Wilfrid's, who acted as Bishop's Chaplain.

The service was a form of shortened Mattins which could offend no one; a kind of Highest Common Measure of Anglicanism. Canon Broadley read it in a voice that was given much ardour and impressiveness by this happy event in the life of our Borough. The curate read the lessons, and when he walked to the lectern there was a stir among the heads of the congregation; they wanted to see this curate of St. Wilfrid's who was a rather famous fellow. "Rather famous" was as much as most of them would allow, it being difficult for men of slow imagination to see how a junior curate of their diocese could really be as famous as, say, Mr. H. A. Vachell, whose books they had read but of whose person they knew nothing. Some of them, who disliked him intensely for having attacked their cloth, would not allow the word "famous" at all, but substituted "notorious," or, if that seemed too much like granting him what he wanted (or what they would have liked themselves), called him "one with a craving for cheap notoriety."

Perhaps these last were faintly disappointed in what they saw, for the youngish man at the lectern did not look in the least like a mountebank. Indeed the face that glanced at them over the eagle's crown was as "spiritual" as any in that congregation, and its large eyes were surprisingly sad. With his

hair dark on the top and nearly white now over the ears, his face sharply moulded in the cast of thought, his eyes so lusted, and his figure that of a tall undergraduate, this young O'Grogan certainly had a presence. And one was forced to admit that there was no trace in him anywhere of conceit or bumptiousness. If he was really bumptious he hid it very well.

After the Third Collect and some prayers by Canon Broadley for our Church, our Diocese, and our National Life at this time, the Bishop went into the pulpit and gave a Charge. A last hymn, and the service was over. The clergy and lay members struggled out of the west doors and strode in a hurrying, haphazard, talkative procession along the sea-front to the Kursaal. Once again the pedestrians on the pavements and the loiterers on the railings turned to watch such an endless chain of parsons, so eager and so noisy. Joe Wylie was still there with his friends and offered his view of the phenomenon.

"The dinner-bell's gone," said he.

"I'll believe you," said George.

"More'n I do. . . . No"—Joe drew some strands of his moustache into his mouth and chewed them over the mystery—"No; I've got it, George! The Bishop's havin' an Orderly Room, and they're gettin' fell in for a strafe."

"There are heaps of Bishops," said George.

And, in truth, more than one dignitary went by in apron and gaiters. Whenever such a one crossed and delighted the vision of Joe, he sprang smartly to attention, and stayed there till the gentleman was six paces past.

"They're the Divisional Generals, George," he explained. "Why don't you treat 'em with proper respect? 'Tisn't often you see half a dozen Bishops of a mornin'."

"They get ten thousand a year, those blokes," said George.

"Well, that'll keep 'em in fags," Joe suggested.

Father Michael came out of the church alone; he was not a popular man. Presently he had a sense that somebody was mending his pace to catch up with him; and a turn of his head showed him that it was Wallas, of St. Peter's, Leigh Bank. The Rev. F. W. Wallas was a fussy little fat man with a silken brown beard; and when Michael Saffery and he were walking side by side, the one with melancholy strides, the other with short quick steps, they were not unlike an ecclesiastical Quixote and his squire.

"What did you think of that?" asked the squire.

"One day," said Father Michael, "we shall have the courage to begin a Diocesan Conference with a High Mass."

"Yes." Mr. Wallas, a Moderate High, was not sufficiently interested in this point to debate it. "Broadley's putting on weight."

"Weight tends to accumulate in a prebendal stall, I've noticed."

"It does. . . . I was interested to see the sensational O'Grogan." Mr. Wallas was one of those who shied from the word "famous." "He's your brother-in-law, or something, isn't he?"

"My wife is his sister."

"First time I've seen him in the flesh, though I've seen his photograph in the papers."

"Have you?" asked Michael, rather as if he had never done so himself.

"I can't think why he stops in the Church, holding the views he does."

"I don't want to appear supercilious," pronounced Michael, "but I must say they always seem to me such extraordinarily youthful views. I mean: I got most of that stuff out of my system in the Sixth Form at school. Most men of intelligence know that there is a great deal of bunk in the world, and not a little in the Church, but they don't feel driven to write smart books about it."

"Quite so. Quite so," acclaimed Mr. Wallas, who would have given much to be able to write such a book and make a success of it. "I agree with you absolutely. And it's so disloyal—giving the enemies of the Lord their occasion to blaspheme. And it would seem he doesn't stop at writing either."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, if all one hears is true——"

"What have you heard?" asked Michael, who was beginning to understand why Mr. Wallas had hurried his steps to join him.

"I can't believe it's true," fussed Mr. Wallas. "If it were he wouldn't have the face to stand up there and take his part in the service before all of us. It'd almost amount to sacrilege."

"But what is it? What have you heard?"

"It's only at third or fourth hand, I confess. There's a woman in my congregation, and she has a well-to-do friend who

was staying last September in the Royal Alexandria Hotel, London, with her daughter. They were dining in the restaurant, these two, when O'Grogan came in. The daughter recognized him at once because she's only seventeen and has a passion for his books, it seems. Cuts out his photograph and sticks it on the front page."

"I know the type," nodded Father Michael, with some pity for them all.

"Yes; and she was so excited that she ran to the bureau afterwards to make sure that a Mr. Antony O'Grogan was staying in the hotel. And of course he was."

"Well, why shouldn't he?"

"Wait. When he came into the dining-room he had a singularly lovely girl with him, who certainly wasn't his wife, because she was hardly more than eighteen. They looked him up in 'Who's Who' and found he was married fifteen years ago. This was a dark-haired child——"

"I think I know who that girl was. He was very friendly with her."

"*Very* friendly. More than friendly, one might say," suggested Mr. Wallas succulently. "A very modern friendship, indeed."

"What do you mean?" Michael screened his eager interest behind incredulous laughter. "You're not suggesting that she spent the night with him?"

"She certainly did."

"I don't believe it. How can you know?"

"This woman and her daughter found that their room was on the same floor as his, and in the morning they chaffed the chambermaid about having a famous writer in her care. And the chambermaid told them, in the course of their talk, that the young lady had come very quietly out of O'Grogan's suite at about six o'clock in the morning."

Michael muttered an expletive, as was appropriate. But the story had stimulated other and inappropriate feelings. Feelings that he did not like; or (perhaps it would be truer to say) feelings that he would not have liked to be overlooked. He knew that he was pleasantly excited by this high-seasoned rumour; that, remembering the beauty of Mary Leith, he was pruriently stirred by it; that, remembering the hostility of Tony, he was hoping—strongly hoping—that it would blossom into wide publicity.

"I hope this story is not widely known," he protested to Mr. Wallas.

"More than one of the brethren have spoken to me of it," said Mr. Wallas, shaking his head sadly, to conceal a warm satisfaction. "Two this morning."

"But I imagine you have kept it as quiet as possible?"

"I have kept it quiet, you may be sure, but"—Mr. Wallas spread impotent hands, and Michael, who was no fool, knew that this bustling little busybody rejoiced in their impotence—"you know how the women tattle among themselves."

They had now entered the concert hall, whose seats were fast filling with the sable audience. Michael, walking between the chairs and the wall, saw Alderman Scrase sitting in solitary dignity and pushed his way to a chair at his side, Mr. Wallas following.

"Ah, Saffery!" greeted the Alderman. "Sit down. A most dignified address of his lordship's this morning, was it not? Most impressive."

"Yes," said the father, who, being a good Catholic, had chosen to think it a milk-and-water affair. He sat next to the Alderman; and Mr. Wallas sat next to him, his umbrella between his knees.

The Bishop appeared on the platform, took the president's seat, and the First Session was begun.

Michael did not listen to the speeches; he could think only of the story he had just heard. The Archdeacon of Southend might be expounding Prayer Book Revision, but Michael was picturing Tony and that dark-eyed Mary Leith in the privacy of their room. And he knew that, while his lips must condemn him, his heart, frustrated and hungry, envied him, disliked him, admired him for his courage, and was jealous of him for its success. He knew that he was impatient to get home and tell Peggy the tale; that he would be driven to whisper it to others of Tony's clerical enemies; that he would pretend to do all in his power to suppress it, but secretly would be comforting himself with the knowledge that its life was sure.

The First Session was over. All were picking up their hats.

"I would ask you two gentlemen to come home to lunch with me," said Mr. Scrase, "but there is insufficient time. I thought of having a little something in the town. Perhaps you would care to join me. As my guests, of course. As my guests."

"We should be delighted," said Michael.

"Thank you. Thank you very much, Alderman," gushed Mr. Wallas.

The three made their way through the crowd and out into the sunny street. Not speaking much, the Alderman led his guests to the Kursaal Creamery, pushed open its glass door, and walked in. Its tables were already black with an assortment of lunching clergy, and its gangways were populous with other clergy who were craning their necks to seek a place for food. The few civilian eaters were staring in astonishment at this invasion—and eating.

No room on the ground floor. Mr. Scrase led them upstairs, and a waitress, recognizing the ex-Mayor, found them a table in a corner. Mr. Scrase picked up the menu. "Whatever else one does in this establishment, one must take cream."

Michael, who did not think this very funny, did not smile; but Mr. Wallas laughed heartily, since his distinguished host had bent towards a joke. Always Mr. Scrase, being an important man, or having the air of importance, was followed by a timider echo; sometimes it was his wife; sometimes it was Mr. Bray. To-day it was Mr. Wallas. Mr. Wallas was very ready to sit in the office of squire, temporarily vacant.

After ordering a table-d'hôte luncheon for all, Mr. Scrase solemnly loyal to his joke, commanded heavy supplies of cream for Father Saffery's fruit salad and Mr. Wallas's meringue.

Then he began to talk; and his talk, as appeared only fitting to him, was a grave and ponderous consideration of the topics debated that morning, which suited neither Michael nor Mr. Wallas, for Michael had not heard the debates, or, when he had heard them, had thought them very Anglican and wishy-washy, and Mr. Wallas was fussily eager to get back to the more piquant dish of Antony O'Grogan. Somewhere between the soup and the next course, he managed to do this.

"A very fine service in your church this morning, Alderman," he said.

Mr. Scrase nodded. "Most impressive, I thought. Most dignified."

"You've quite a famous curate in your Mr. O'Grogan."

"H'm." Mr. Scrase left this opinion without a comment.

Mr. Wallas turned to Michael.

"Would it be fair to tell the Alderman what we were discussing this morning?"

Michael shrugged. A shrug that committed him not at all. If events moved forward without his aid, he was not responsible.

"What was that?" inquired Mr. Scrase.

"Should I tell him?" Mr. Wallas repeated.

"Certainly tell me," commanded Mr. Scrase, whose dignity was a little injured by being left like a child, uninformed.

"It might be wisest in the long run . . ." Mr. Wallas ruminated aloud—and within the next few minutes the story was told.

Indignation would be too small a word to fit the Alderman's response. It was horror; it was confusion; it was wrath.

"I never heard such a story! If it's true—if it's true—he should be hounded out of the Church! But it can't be true. I can never believe it. Have you charged him with it?"

"Me? No. I've never seen him till this morning."

"But you, Saffery?"

"Please . . . I am not in this. . . . I beg you to leave me out of it. He is my brother-in-law."

"Yes, I know. . . ." The Alderman was balked and bewildered; and, as often happens, he found relief in solving an easier and more immediate problem. "Confound it, is it never possible to get any mustard in these places? Waitress, would you very kindly give us some mustard? . . . Thank you. . . . Yes, I know, but . . ."

A relationship did not seem very impressive in such a shocking affair. One's manifest duty to the Church should surely take precedence over all other considerations. . . . Surely. . . . There was a duty to be done . . . to the people . . . to the sanctity of Orders. Good heavens, it was unthinkable that such a man should be allowed to——

"I am incapable of realizing it. It's unimaginable. Does Broadley know anything about it?"

"I should think not. It has only just worked its way round to me."

"He cannot know anything about it. Of course not. Or he would not be sitting still under it. I must—no, it would be better to ascertain first how much of it is true. It would be dreadful to be making such suggestions if there's some horrible mistake."

"I sincerely hope there is a mistake," assured Mr. Wallas, who would have been cruelly disappointed at any such anticlimax.

"I sincerely hope so too," agreed the Alderman, and he was speaking the truth. . . . "There is your cream. . . . Good heavens, I feel really shaken by this. I have felt all along that that young man would bring himself to disaster . . . but I pray we may be wrong." He took out his watch. "Time's passing, but don't you hurry. I will just call for the bill. . . . Waitress ! "

He sank into silence while Father Michael blent his cream with his fruit salad, and Mr. Wallas adjusted his to his meringue like a bricklayer adjusting mortar to a brick. It is probable that all three, whether or not they knew it, were happy and aglow, but the Alderman the least happy of the three. Mr. Wallas, could he have given a true expression of his feelings, would have changed his shaking of his head into a rubbing of his knees, for he had seldom spent so spanking a morning ; Father Michael, who had spiritual insight, knew well that if a sponge could be passed over this story, he would not wish it to pass ; Alderman Scrase, restless and fretted, was mingling a large distress, and not a small pity, with his unseen delight in indignation, and in the prospect of doing his duty and taking a strong line.

Soon afterwards they walked silently to the next session of the Diocesan Conference.

CHAPTER III

THE BEECHWOOD AGAIN

AND all the days Tony was engaged in his ding-dong conflict with the enemy. The enemy's weapons were blunter, maybe, but they could still stun; and never a day but Tony took their blow, or fought to avoid it. In times of despair he would tell himself that, even if the impossible hope were granted him and he married Mary, this sickening fear would haunt his life. Because he had entered upon his wooing of her frivolously and heedlessly, this doubt, this messenger of Satan, must always buffet him. Its strength would become less and less, but it would never go; the thorn was in the flesh.

Meanwhile the astonishing process of sanctification went on. One by one, the walls of self, which had constricted his power to love, went down. Astonishing that a few months of his secret asceticism should have built such muscles of will; in the power of Mary's name they would lift any weight. No self-sacrifice for others was too difficult; he had only to say, "For her sake, that I may love her perfectly," and he went and did it. He searched for opportunities of difficult kindness; he hungered for them; and, each kindness done, he felt a peculiar thrill as if he had taken a step nearer Mary. As strange a development as any was the power that had come to him to love Honor. The awakening of desire in Honor had undoubtedly worked its own physiological changes in her, giving it would seem, a new softness and roundness to her limbs, a new freshness to her skin, a new seductiveness to her movements, a new sweetness to her expression, and a new gentleness to her nature. But it was not this change in Honor, remarkable though it was, that enabled him to love her better; it was the change in himself. Peevishness shed and generosity indued,

he would chafe no longer at her failings, or other people's, and was free to love them where they were fine and good. All this time he kept his sufferings from her view and showed her only liveliness and high humour, that she might be happy again and without anxiety for him; and he rejoiced to do this. Sometimes it cut like a knife that she should suppose he was forgetting Mary, but there was a joy in taking this wound for her sake; and, on the whole, their fellowship together—so strange was Mary's gift to them both—had a sweeter quality than any since its first years.

It was along this road that the enemy ambushed him again. He was writing a sermon one morning—and his sermons tended always now towards a single truth—and suddenly he knew that he was face to face with a maddening thought. It had to be looked in the eyes and defeated. He laid down his pencil and stared at it. He stood up, trembling slightly.

"If," said the thought, "you can compel yourself towards this love for your fellows, ought you not to make yourself love them all equally with Mary—especially Honor? You are freeing yourself of every impatience and every fastidiousness in order to be able to love one person flawlessly; will not this process, when completed, emancipate you from the small man's selection of one, and free you to love all equally with her? Perhaps you have been called all your life to nothing less than this, and she was but sent to touch you with power."

"What? Lift all to her level—sink her to the level of all the rest—so that she becomes but one of a multitude?"

"Yes," answered the thought.

It was withering him: the face of the enemy had the face of truth. It had attacked from in front this time; not from the dark recesses of the old character, but on the sunny open road of the new. He couldn't do it—why had the thought come to him? Ah, this thinking was a disease. In the power of her name, lift the others to her place and reduce her to one of a multitude—where had he got to? But if it were the truth for him—oh, he must get this thought out of the way for ever, or it would return to terrify him again. Tortured—hardly knowing what he was doing—he hurried from the house, took out his car, and drove. An automaton drove that car, savagely but with a somnambulist's skill; drove it from Thames-mouth to London, and southward from London to Sussex; while the man above the automaton wrestled with his enemy,

and wrestled, and wrestled—now up, now down. It looked so true; it looked so like the call to that final sanctity of which he had always dreamed. *Must* he do it. Must he give up Mary—by raising the others to her level?

“Consider,” said the thought, exaggerating all things: “you are middle-aged, and she is a child—when will you wake up to it? You will never have her. Would it not be better to lift your love from a passionate lover’s to a passionless saint’s?”

He dropped his head over the wheel. Nothing in the world, nothing in time would ever change this iron fact of his age. Good to die, and wait on the other side of death till she should be his equal in age; or till she should join him beyond death, where age had no meaning. . . .

“But you are shirking the fight. You have retreated to old ground. If you are to love all equally with her, what will she be in eternity? But one of the multitude.”

“Then I will not do it. I want to spend eternity alone with her. . . . It is asking too much of me. I cannot do this.”

He must have driven seventy miles. Already he was on Sussex roads, and in a few minutes would be passing the lane that led to Albourne. Here it was, and he could see the roof of Sheep’s Eye Cottage to which he had brought Honor on the evening of their elopement—oh, have pity, God; have pity! And there was the noble shape of Wolstonbury, round as the top of a world. All thought suspended, in a dull leaden head, he turned the car towards Hurst, where he had been a young schoolmaster in the days—those oddly pitiable days—before Mary appeared. He drove through by-lanes to Danny Farm, and stopped the car under a barn-house wall. As the engine died, and he stepped out, he remarked how the rooks were cawing in the woods of Danny. He walked along the cart-track that led to the beechwood; it was before his eyes, the beechwood where he had lain with her in the dog’s-mercury leaves. Its trees were bare as besoms on this March day, and the giant bowl of Wolstonbury, lifting behind, was dull in its winter green. Right of him billowed the line of the Downs, but a mist erased their distance, and Chanctonbury could not be seen. Left of him lay the field which had been ablow with oats that day, and now was overturned by the plough.

Not at once did he go into the wood. He stood and looked

up at Wolstonbury. He was creating a picture: a picture of himself and Jill sitting up there, on one of England's last days of peace, and telling each other their creeds. He had been saying to her something like this:

"Jill, my dear, I have been struggling for months past with a thought which I can't get into words. I can only *see* it. But these downs help me to see it in a sort of parable. There are two kinds of beauty before us now, aren't there?"

"Are there?" Jill had inquired, with her eyebrows humorously arched.

"Yes. Of course there are! There's the rather luxuriant beauty down in the valley there—a matter of flowers and orchards and small, individual things, and all rather lush. And then there's the graver, lonelier, bleaker beauty of these bare downs—a matter of line and mass and shadow. We climb from one to the other. Well, I'm wondering whether the higher beauty oughtn't to be more satisfying, just because it's spacious and impersonal and lonely. And perhaps this wide un-individual beauty of the bare hills is only a step towards some austerer beauty still—I mean, the beauty of the ice-fields, and so on, up and up, to the completest beauty of all, which is—I don't know—something bleaker and colder than poor human minds dare imagine."

That was what he had said up there. Must he go up towards those ice-fields now—in the power of Mary's name? Must he need her less, and sink her in others, because his love had overcome self? Must he need her not at all, because he loved her perfectly? . . . It was a vision rather wonderful; it would be cold on the ice-fields, but very exhilarating.

But first . . . but wait. . . . He entered the wood and walked up the winding track till he came to the mossy path which led into the hollow where they had lain. "I must remember the exact spot," he had said to her. "Let's see: it's the largest of the beech trunks with three unhappy yews around. I may return here one day, a sentimental ghost." Not like this, had he foreseen his return! There it was, the great bole of the tree, with its three unhappy yews, and—an hour ago he had imagined he would fling himself down upon the dead leaves and let his heart break over them—but he was feeling nothing. The place was not wounding him at all; only the enemy was stunning him. Because he could not grieve the enemy was annihilating all his assurance of love;

and with its fall went everything. No need to worry about the full claims of sanctity ; all striving was over.

For a minute he accepted this ; and he sat down dully, where he had hoped to fall prostrate and weep.

"It's all so simple, Mary. I had a tenderness for you, but little else. Everything else was dream ; not truth. I must accept it, and then I shall be free of you—my beloved—and free from all strain. It's perfectly simple—not a matter worthy of these miseries—and yet—and yet I would like to die."

But with desire for death came the thought that his death would hurt her and then the certainty that he would endure anything rather than hurt her—and at once he was hoping again and happy again. It was all back : the assurance, the amazement at his previous doubt, the happy need to strive, and the problem as to the goal of his striving. Give her up, by raising the others to her level ? No, never. All his being cried out that it would never suffer this—and he laid the palm of his hand on the place where she had lain. If he tried to break past this last resistance he would go mad. He must allow a little to the hungry human in him. Somehow—in some way now almost incomprehensible—he had contrived to make of Mary a distant star to which his whole life turned, and he must keep her there.

When he rose he was nearer peace. He believed that somewhere here in this decision he would find a balance for his nature. If he allowed himself this little—just to keep her above all others as the star that evoked all betterment—he would reconcile, or nearly reconcile, the two who warred in him perpetually, the lover and the monk.

CHAPTER IV

A CHARGE

THE healing came gradually. It came with a deeper and deeper knowledge of himself. Straining ever to understand this maddening cycle of doubt, denial, despair and then assurance and amazement at the doubt, he would probe his whole life to its earliest days. And he saw that from the dawn of intelligent, separate life he had been searching for something—searching—searching—and never finding it; never “arriving” and resting. Perhaps this search had its root in the inadequacy of a tired, disheartened mother’s response to him, her youngest child. It was noteworthy that the same search was present in Peggy, the next youngest, but conspicuously absent in Joyce, the eldest but one. This search had been disappointed by all, till now he was impotent to believe in its success, if he saw it. The impotence enlarged the puniest fear into an emotional terror that had no justice in reason. Mary, he believed, would have cured that impotence by the perfection of her response; but he had been dragged from her just as the process was beginning, and just as he had overthrown his character, violently, in a desperate effort to reach her. Let him only believe—let him only know that she would have been an answer to his search, and he was safe.

But while his reason construed it thus, his soul accepted it as punishment. For that which, in reason’s eye, is an inevitable sequence, to the soul’s eye can be remedial correction. The soul will look upon these things with a different slant from reason; and so it must always be, for full men, till world dilemmas are composed.

His conflict stilled, all the energy which it had drained away was released for a more perfect realization that he had lost Mary; and of that agony we do not speak. Except only to

say that it drove him, in the end, a little nearer to God. There issued from it the knowledge that he must protect jealously, and slowly increase, all that made for good in Mary's coming, if he was to give a beauty to this last anguish in memory and save it from darkness. And if he took this last high hurdle pluckily, he would give the good some increase.

It is to be understood, then, how Tony became a kindly priest, humble, sad and humorous. The mental sickness, falling from him, left only the knowledge that Mary was the one person whom he had loved increasingly; and the will to service. He would never be a good priest, for he had far too many doubts; but he believed he had some truths to tell his people, and one more strongly than any other; a simple truth, perhaps, but it was one thing to see these truths with the brain, and another thing to experience them in the life; one did not know them till one had lived them. His truth was this: that all men in their inmost hearts desired more than all else to love perfectly, and nearly all men failed; and the fault was not in the love but in themselves, because they would not strive to make of themselves vessels large enough to hold it. Full love came only to the worthy. This was the substance of all his preaching, and it was the substance of his life.

Many people loved him now.

He still indulged the old irrational hope. It was early summer, and Mary had long been back in Canada, but still he could not hear the postman clicking the gate without the old hope stirring. One day, as a letter clapped to the floor, he ran to pick it up, hoping he knew not what. As always, it gave him the mild disappointment; it was a long envelope with the imprint of the Bishop's Palace, Coleborough. He took the envelope, a bulky packet, into his study and his chair, and broke it. He had not read three lines before he leapt up in anger. It was written by the Bishop's own hand, in manifest pity and affection, and it told him of a serious charge lodged against him by certain of the laity. A copy of their evidence was enclosed. It concluded: "My dear son, if, after having read the evidence, you will want to come and talk to me about it, please come at once. I am waiting to hear all that you will say, and I feel confident that you will be able to rebut this charge. In sincere affection, your Father in God, Wilfrid Coleborough."

Dumbfounded, but, most curiously, not without a lift of

pleasurable excitement such as danger always raised in him, he read the charge and the evidence. Great God, how long had this been going on? How long had people been spying on him? The charge, "submitted with the greatest sorrow, and only out of a deep sense of duty to the Church," by the wardens of St. Wilfrid's, Christopher Scrase and William Bray, was one of adultery, and the evidence alleged that he had spent the night of September the 12th, of the previous year, at an hotel in London with a woman not his wife. It was the evidence of office clerks, a waiter, a chambermaid, and a visitor at the hotel.

"Honor." He stood at the door and called again. "Honor!"

Honor, sensing alarm in his voice, came quickly, and turned white as she saw that his body was shaking.

"What is the matter?"

He beckoned her to come in and closed the door.

"Read this."

She dropped to the edge of a chair, and read it.

"Tony!"

"You know all about it—how much of it is true—and how much a lie."

"Oh, Tony, what are you going to do?"

"I have decided. I shall ask for an audience with the Bishop at once, in the presence of these people, and I shall tell them the truth. Do you—do you mind?"

Honor, after looking frightened, suddenly jumped up brightly. "No, no! Of course that's best. It'll be difficult to make them understand, but they will—they *must*. Oh, Tony, and you gave her up for me! . . ." Her finger flew to her mouth as she thought. "And, Tony, you must let me come with you, and I'll tell them that you told me everything, and that I *wanted* you to go to her. Oh, can't we go *now*? Can't we do something?"

She went to the door and grasped the handle.

"I'm going this minute to see the Scrases and tell them how wrong they are. . . . Oh, why didn't they talk to me before they took such a wicked step? . . . I'll go now—may I?"

"Bless you." He kissed her. "But," added he with a wry smile, "you won't convince the Alderman of my innocence; he has too high a sense of duty."

Honor, a pale and shaken Honor, sped away on her mission,

while Tony, impatient for action, went to his desk and snatched fumblingly at pen and paper. He wrote with difficulty. His head had become tight, and though words and sentences danced within its dull-walled prison, they would not issue in forms that he could accept and pass. They seemed rhetorical and guilty; or rude; or cold. His final letter was no more than three lines petitioning for a meeting with the Bishop in the presence of his accusers.

Then he went to his easy chair, and held his pipe between his teeth with both hands.

That tremor of pleasurable excitement was being frozen now by the ice-cold threat before him. Exposure . . . public execration, or if not that, public pity. . . . His servants knowing . . . the people in the streets knowing and watching him as he passed. . . . Stay: he had been through these emotions before. He remembered that knickerbockered schoolboy, O'Grogan Minor, walking in a great despair to his school, where a flogging awaited him and, worse, a public laughter for having loved little Wavers, and a public lynching for having bullied him. . . . All old friends knowing in their distant homes . . . the whisper of an old disgrace dogging him through life. . . . Why did Heaven smite you like this, just when you were trying to be good? It made no difference what you tried to be; the past came home for payment. Curious how set was his desire to be tolerant and humorous and forgiving. He could feel no disappointment with Heaven, nor vindictiveness against the Alderman; he could even admire that majestic old fool. Curious, too, how much he had cast of his pride and his "personalness." One's good name no longer seemed the most important thing in the world, as it had seemed all through the war. This threat was frightening him certainly; but a year ago it would have shrivelled him. . . . Not now.

Honor, returning, put an end to his thoughts.

"Well, child, what success?"

"I don't know," she sighed, sitting down and slowly drawing off her gloves. "He says that of course he'll hear what you have to say in the presence of the Bishop. But I don't think he sees himself withdrawing his charge. He was terribly wordy about his consideration for me——"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Tony; "I can hear that part."

"And Mrs. Scrase was quite unpardonably kind, holding

my hand in hers as if she pitied me. She, I am sure, has no doubt of your guilt."

"Of course she hasn't; nor that her noble, incorruptible husband must do his duty, however painful."

"Horrible, horrible old man!" exclaimed Honor.

Tony laughed. "It's funny, but I can't think him horrible. I've been considering the matter in a mood of godlike detachment and I've come to the conclusion that he's a rather splendid old nincompoop."

"I've come to the conclusion that he's a loathsome old pig," said Honor.

The following morning Paston announced, "There's a man wants to see you, sir."

Tony looked up from his desk. "What man?"

"He came to the back door, sir, with a lady. Says his name is Wylie, and you'll know him all right."

"Oh, Wylie, is it? What does he want?"

"I don't know, sir. He particularly requested that I should say he hadn't come to ask for anything. Just a private matter that would interest you, if you could spare him ten minutes."

"Well." Tony stood up to receive visitors. "Let them come in."

Tib Wylie entered, giving a lady-like "Thenk you" to Paston, who had held open the door for her. Joe followed. Tib was arrayed in all her full-blown best, as if for a visit of some dignity, and she had probably given some pains to her husband, who looked unusually smart in a celluloid collar, bow tie, and sabbath suit of dark blue. She screwed up her short-sighted eyes at this sumptuous parlour; and Joe, made a little nervous by it, passed his bowler hat under his moustache, left and right.

"Very nice of you to come and see me," greeted Tony.

"Do sit down."

"I 'ope your man made it clear that we ain't come to ask for anything," said Joe sitting, with deference, on the edge of one arm-chair, while his wife arranged herself, with lady-like ease, in another.

"Yes," agreed Tib, richly explanatory and sympathetic. "You must be always being bothered like that. I meanter say! Some people have no feelin's, and no shame."

"Paston explained that it was private," said Tony, who had drawn up a chair.

"Is *he* your batman nah, sir?"

"Something like that, Joe."

"Well, I reckon you've made a change for the better, sir, if you arst me." This being almost a joke, Joe laid a coy bowler hat over his mouth, and then began his business. "Well, sir, it's like this—it's like this—strike me, it's difficult to say it, Tib, now we've come."

Mrs. Wylie rustled with understanding, and decided that she must address her own competent hands to the difficulty. "We hope you won't take it as a liberty, sir, but we heard abaht this charge they're bringin' against yer, and we thought we'd like to come round and offer you our sympathy in person—if you take my meanin'."

"Yuss." Joe corroborated this. "We thought we'd write it at first, but it didn't come easy."

"Oh, you've both heard about it, have you?" Nothing in Tony's manner showed the wounded fluttering of his heart.

"Christ, yes——" began Joe.

But Mrs. Wylie took him up quickly. "Just one or two have spoken abaht it, sir—in confidence like; and Joe and I have properly seen 'em 'ome, you may be sure. We've said we don't believe a word of it, 'aven't we, Joe?"

"Course we 'ave!"

"What's the story you've heard then, Joe?"

"Only that that there Scrase had laid a charge against you for—wurl, you know what, sir—and that the case would be comin' on soon. When I heard it was 'im, I made sure you was innocent."

"We'd have bin sure of it any'ow," corrected Tib Wylie.

"Yurse," agreed Joe, accepting this hint and lying splendidly. "Yurse; o' course! But ain't it funny, sir—what gets me, sir, is this. He caught me and did for me, and now he's after you. Queer, ain't it?"

For the first time Tony remembered Kit. "I suppose we've managed somehow to put ourselves in his toils, Joe."

"Yes; and we're the only two people as knows about Captain Scrase; and his father's downed both of us. There's something queer about it."

It certainly did seem queer as Tony thought about it. There was silence.

"Tell 'im yore idea," prompted Tib.

"Well, sir, I don't see why he should be allowed to 'ave it all his own way. I don't, straight. And I was going to suggest

that, if you'd allow me, I'd go rahnd and tell 'im a thing or two."

"No, Joe."

"Jest wait, sir: I ain't finished yet. I don't mean that I'd threaten to make it public, all abaht Captain Scrase, but that I'd tell 'im the story and how good you was to his boy at the end, and how the Captain'd turn in his grave if he knew that his father was doin' this to you; and if after that he didn't take back his charge, then he's a dirtier old——" Joe hesitated, and decided to hold back the word—"a dirtier old man than I took him for. How does that strike you, sir?"

Tony thought. "No," he repeated. "The point isn't that Captain Scrase's story should not be published, but that his father and mother should never hear it. . . . No, I couldn't tell them, and you couldn't either. You've only got to think of Captain Scrase, and you know you couldn't."

"I'm not sure," mused Joe. "I wouldn't care to tell his mother; I don't want to 'urt *her*, silly old geezer though she is——"

"Oh, Joe, you *are* awful," reproached his wife.

"That's all right, Tib; Captain O'Grogan understands *me*. And the old man'd never tell her, sir, you can bet your life on that—so *she'd* be all right. But I wouldn't mind putting '*im* wise about a thing or two, if it'd save you, sir. There, sir, I've said it!"

"And, sir—if you'll excuse me buttin' in"—this was Tib Wylie—"I agree with Joe. I do. I ain't got a 'a'porth of sympathy for that old man—not a 'a'porth. In fact I'd like to see him put in his place, and that's the truth, if you kill me for it." She rustled with conviction. "If it's you or 'im, sir, then I'm for you. You was good to Captain Scrase and you was good to Jow, and I——" the rest was muffled because Tib was blowing her nose. "I stands by my friends, anyhow, yuss," said she, as she dabbed her eyes.

"Yurse!" endorsed Joe.

"Give 'im all he arsts for, *I* say," continued Tib, rearranging her handkerchief into a ball.

"No," objected Tony. "He's an old man. Let him be."

"Tryin' to 'ound you out of the church!" protested Tib indignantly, but to the empty air before her.

"Well, sir, it's for you to say," Joe decided.

"Crool!" murmured Mrs. Wylie, to the air.

"No, Joe. Nothing doing," said Tony.

"Worth a 'undred of 'im, any day," pronounced Mrs. Wylie to her unseen confidant.

"That's settled, then, is it, sir?" asked Joe.

"Yes."

"Right! Nah we've got Battalion Orders." He accepted it philosophically, and shoved his hands into his pockets.

"I hope someone does for 'im," muttered Mrs. Wylie, as a last shot. "I do devahtly. Yuss."

She recovered, put her handkerchief in her bag, and addressed herself to Tony. "Of course you understand we don't believe it. Or, if we did, we shouldn't think so much the worse of you either. After all! . . ."

"Yurse," agreed Joe, emphatically.

"I meanter say!" explained Tib; and left her meaning in those words.

"Well, I can only tell you"—Tony tried to laugh—"that I'm not guilty of the charge as it's framed. Whether I shall be able to prove my innocence I don't know. But if I tell you this, you'll believe it, won't you?"

"Absolutely, sir," Joe affirmed, smartly as a soldier. "Absolutely! You say so, and there's an end of it. And it's the same for my old Trouble-and-Strife here. Ain't it, Tib?"

"O' course!"

"And will they"—Joe's eyes lit up with interest—"will they try you in a sort of court? Because, if so, the missus and I thought we'd like to be there, if you could get us a seat. We thought we'd like to be kinda sittin' among your friends."

"It may not come to that."

"I see." One felt that Joe, in seeing, was slightly disappointed. "Because I'd have guaranteed to raise a hell of a cheer when they acquitted yer, even though I was escorted aht of the court."

"I'm sure you would, Joe," laughed Tony.

"Well"—Mrs. Wylie, who was apt to take command on state occasions, stood up—"I expect you won't want us to be botherin' you any more at a time like this. Come on, Joe. All we can do is to wish you the very best of luck. The very best."

"Yussir," said Joe. "Every time!"

"It's extraordinarily kind of you," Tony acknowledged. "I hardly know how to thank you for coming like this."

"Thet's nothin', sir. *Thet's* nothin'. Don't you worry about that."

"Delighted, I'm sure," echoed Tib.

"And if anyone says anything to us, we'll tell 'em to shut it. We'll tell 'em that there's nothin' in it; and we 'appen to know."

"Thank you, Joe. And not a word about Captain Scrase to anyone."

"Not a word on this side o' Jordan, sir. You trust *me*!"

Tony held the door open for the lady, who sailed out with a "Thenk you," her husband following. From his window he watched them as they went down the garden drive, Tib tossing her head in satisfaction that the sentiments had been honoured, and Joe rather ashamed of himself and therefore whispering a bashful jocosity into her ear.

While Tony was granting his audience to Joe and Tib Wylie, a comely woman of forty, with a face fresh and young, was sitting in a local train as it ambled between Southend and Thamesmouth. "Comely" was the word that most people would have used to describe her, but she, Peggy, would not have liked to hear it. They might desire no difference in her, but she desired a difference of ten, fifteen or twenty pounds. This deduction would probably have spoiled her contours and detracted from her charm; she half knew that it would spoil the contours and the charm, both of which she valued highly; and yet she could not stop desiring it. She could not escape her dread of losing slimness and becoming what she called "a fine woman." Better to be just a shade less attractive than fine. Sometimes, since she was nothing but the full flower of the conscience-harried child of thirty years before, she would wonder how far this desire for slimness accorded with her desire for sanctity; and whether she sinned in giving so much thought to her figure, and in taking more time over her bedroom exercises than she took over her bedroom prayers. Especially as she performed these rather ridiculous exercises only behind a closed door; stopped them with a guilty immediacy if she heard Michael approaching; and was busy expunging the last traces of them when he entered. But on the whole, she

thought not ; she forgave most people their venial sins with an infinite readiness—and sometimes, unlike her God, their mortal ones too—and she was inclined to forgive this one to Peggy O’Grogan. (In such contexts as these, Peggy always thought of herself as Peggy O’Grogan.) And anyhow, whether she forgave it or not, she was quite sure that it was going on.

She was thinking now of that child of thirty years ago. Impatient with the slowness of the train, she gazed from the window but without sight of the flat meadows or the occasional sea. She was remembering her bedroom in the Kensington home that night after Tony had disgraced himself at school and promptly lost himself in London. She had lain in bed, eyes open in the dark, wondering how Keatings, Joyce and Derek could so enjoy the excitements of the search instead of projecting themselves into the runaway’s mind and suffering with him. Which was what she had immediately done, with much passion and prayer.

Peggy decided that the child whom she saw in that bedroom was “rather sweet.” A child who found it difficult to put a penny of her pocket-money into the alms-plate, and loathed having to say her prayers at night, and could not stop stealing biscuits off the sideboard, and fibbed at school with heart-breaking aplomb ; and yet, in her dreams of the future, saw herself always as a nun with a severe face framed in a wimple—or a nurse with a lamp in her hand—or a “sister” to the whole world, and one, moreover, who accounted as her favourite brothers the bedraggled, the old, the wicked, the smelly, the spurned. How she had longed in those days to kiss a leper ! And how restless she had been, that night, for Tony to be brought home in safety, that she might run and “side with” him while the others were still siding against him ! And what moments of fear she had known—sinful fear—lest they should forgive him and be kind to him before she could !

And that child had become this buxom woman sitting in the train ; and Tony had become a grey, distinguished priest ; and none the less she could wonder, as the train dawdled on, whether the thirty years had wrought so much difference in either of them. Great differences in degree, no doubt, but little in kind. Tony had plunged then into an impossible love and floundered thereafter in social shame ; and she had truly captured his suffering for herself and longed (not without a keen appreciation of her nobility) to be the perfect sister. And what was

happening now? Probably his love was more real this time, even as her longing to go to him was more pure; but the same two children were at work.

When, some months before, Michael had returned from a Diocesan Conference to tell her of whisperings about Tony and Mary Leith, she had dismissed them summarily.

"I never believe anything I hear about parsons. And if they are successful parsons, I believe still less."

But in her heart she had suspected that they might be true; and in her self-analysis she had perceived, with much interest, and some self-approval, that she was feeling neither shock nor condemnation. Why?

Peggy's elbow found the window-ledge, and her soft face chaired itself in her worn hand. She watched the country coming nearer; but soon the telegraph wires mesmerized her from sight of it, as they switchbacked everlastingly from pole to pole. "If," she pondered, remembering an old conversation with Tony, "she were to love another man than Michael, and love him so well that she was enlarged and sanctified by the love, would she go to him?" And as she pictured herself going to him, all that hunger to find the perfect thing, which had haunted the lives of Peggy and Tony, seemed to swell up into an ecstasy of conviction. Yes . . . if Michael were to be good about it, she would go where she could give more. Her heart speeded with this dream, and her brain scintillated with a thrilling joy—and then she knew that she wouldn't go. She wouldn't go, because her life was fixed on Christ, and she would accept His ruling. But Tony's was not, for all his priesthood. His unresting masculine intellect would not allow it to fix there. Christ was not the magnetic north for him, holding him to goodness. And probably this Mary was.

When Michael's story reached her, she had debated whether to go and tell Tony of everybody's beastliness, but, knowing that Mary Leith was gone now to her home at the other end of the world—so Peggy conceived of Canada—she decided that the rumour would pass and be heard of no more, and it would be kindest not to distress him with words of her. Instead she took refuge in daily prayers for them both. That sweet girl!—her thoughts were as much with Mary as with her brother. It didn't seem right, in Peggy's extraordinary dialectic, that anyone who did such a kindness to the world by being so beautiful should be asked to suffer like the rest of us.

And then, this very morning, a woman of Southend had made whisper of a charge against Tony; and, half an hour later, another woman had repeated the whisper; and Peggy had rushed home to Michael for his denial—or confirmation. “I’ve known all about that for ages,” Michael had said; and something in the levity of his answer had shown her that, so far from being perturbed, he was even pleased.

Reproach could have burst from her in tears. “Oh, why, why didn’t you tell me?” she demanded, with hands clenching.

“I thought it would upset you,” said Michael. “I hoped it’d blow over, without reaching your ears.”

Hoped—*bah!* she did not say what she thought, but ran out of the room. What was she to do? Oh, what, *what?* A letter? But how wait two days for an answer? A telegram? But how say in a telegram all that she was burning to say? The telephone? No, no, no. One compulsive idea occupied her mind—and spread—and spread. She had to yield to it. She ran upstairs, packed a hand-bag, tossed the next week’s house-keeping to the cook, ran to Southend Station and took the first train, a slow local, to Thamesmouth. And now as the meadows told her that the train was drawing near to Thamesmouth, she framed the words with which she would explain her arrival to Honor and Tony: “Please, I’ve come to stay. I want to be with you both.”

CHAPTER V

A TRIAL

THE Gothic door of the Bishop's Palace, with its Gothic bell, was raising some vague but interesting ideas in Tony, when a spruce maid, not the least Gothic, answered his summons and drew the door open. She led them, Tony and Honor, along a church-like corridor and showed them into the drawing-room, where she left them.

If the corridor had been sombre and semi-sacred this big drawing-room was entirely cheerful and profane. If the corridor had been a little like Alderman Scrase (thought Tony) this room was a little like Sister Joyce: not modern or original, but happy. The broad field of floor was covered with a white Indian carpet; the sofas and chairs were petticoated in a frolicsome cretonne, all roses and leaves and birds; the top of the grand piano was alight with silver frames; and a fire (the Bishop and his wife were old) danced and purred in the brassy grate. Three tall windows, their curtains strained back, added three pictures of lawns and flower-beds to the brightness of the room.

Tony looked around. "H'm," laughed he, since he must hide any nervousness, "as a setting for my trial it is somewhat inapt."

"What lovely flowers!" exclaimed Honor, who must also deny the quivering of her heart.

Flowers were everywhere: purple irises, red carnations, white roses, yellow roses, purple tulips, pink tulips and deep red wallflowers.

"A good show for my funeral," ventured Tony; and just then the Bishop came in.

His violet cassock and bright pectoral cross brought the scene a little nearer to aptness. But not his manner. A thin little

ancient man, with a dried face but alert and kindly eyes that were forgiving the world most things before they turned from it, he studied to keep the talk away from all unanswered charges and as natural and happy as might be. He discussed the garden with Tony, and made a few little jokes with Honor.

He did not have to maintain this generous falsity long, for Mr. Scrase and Mr. Bray were announced. The Alderman, fully dressed for a regrettable duty, came forward and, ceremoniously bowing, shook the Bishop's hand. To Tony and Honor he bowed distantly. Mr. Bray copied him in both these movements, but more awkwardly. Mr. Bray, in fact, was the essential echo to-day.

Five minutes behind these gentlemen came Canon Broadley, palpably ill-at-ease and wondering how to meet this ungenial situation. His method, at present, was to be pleasant with all, to Bishop, Churchwardens and Curate—to judge, prosecution and defence.

The Bishop requested them all to be seated. He sat himself, not as a judge facing his court, but as a father with his family, in a deep arm-chair which turned towards the fire. On the sofa opposite him, Tony, the defendant, and Honor, his sole witness, sat side by side. Mr. Scrase assumed the second arm-chair, one pace behind the Bishop's, and, dropping into it, brought his hands together and interlaced the fingers. Mr. Bray drew up a lighter chair and sat *on* it rather than in it, and stared out at the garden. The Vicar, after wandering a little, found a low, long fauteuil at some distance away; and from this comfortable place, for the rest of the afternoon, watched the realities of life pass by, and was content to be confused.

Without lifting his eyes from the grate, the Bishop said, "Well, Mr. O'Grogan, you will be able to explain everything, I know;" and he closed his eyes. One might believe he closed them for a moment of prayer.

"Yes, my lord," said Tony, and began his story. He told it simply, with no excuses and little comment. "I feel I was guilty in the beginning, my lord, but I fell in love with her and I found it very hard to draw away." Behind his quiet speech his emotions were strangely jumbled; there was a pity for his wife since his words would wound her; there was shame, but less before his own conscience than before the consciences of Alderman and Vicar, who would not understand; and, leaping unashamedly among these, there was that instinctive joy which

the mention of Mary would always light in him. As he spoke, the Alderman stiffened more than once, but the Bishop only fingered his glittering cross and stared into the fire. Honor kept her head bent. Mr. Bray fidgeted on his chair.

But when he came to the events of the last night, Mr. Bray, who had been glancing at pictures or scraping stains from his coat, forgot these matters in a new and keener interest, and fixed his eyes on the narrator.

"I meant her to go at midnight," said Tony, "but I found it too hard at the end, and I kept her as long as I could. . . ."

Voice and words failed him, and the Bishop came to his help.

"Quite so, my boy. . . . The—the evidence says she was seen to leave the hotel very early in the morning . . . crying bitterly."

"Yes. I meant her to go at midnight, but—I loved her——" He was going to say "very dearly," but thought of Honor—"and we sat together till the daylight frightened us."

"I see. . . . And you did no more than sit there together, I am sure?"

"That was all, my lord."

The Alderman spoke: "In each other's embrace, I imagine?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tony.

"Naturally, naturally," murmured the Bishop, somewhat to the Alderman's surprise. "And you say you sat there for a whole night?"

"There was a time when she slept for a little, and I just watched by her side."

"Ah, poor child!" . . . The Bishop sighed over this picture of the sleeping Mary. His hand lifted and sank sadly. "Well . . . the evidence says—you know, my boy, I only want to hear how you meet it—it says that a bed had been slept in."

"When she was gone, my lord, I was very unhappy, and I went and lay down on the outside of the bed with my face in the pillow. I lay there some hours: I could not leave till the hotel was awake and I had settled my account. It was a September morning, and I turned very cold. There was no fire in the room and I drew the bed-clothes over me."

The Bishop nodded. "I see . . . I see . . . And—the evidence suggests that you yourself left the hotel very early, without showing yourself to anyone."

"It is right. I did not want to meet anybody."

"Of course not. . . . Naturally. . . . And you have not seen her since?"

"No, my lord. That was the end."

A silence waited to be broken. Mr. Bray, feeling that he ought to justify his presence, broke it.

"Pardon me, my lord"—and he looked at Honor. "Mr. O'Grogan says that he told all this to you, Mrs. O'Grogan. May we ask, do you accept his story?"

Honor lifted her head. "I *know* it is all true."

The Alderman shifted his position in his chair. Mr. Bray returned to his examining of the pictures. The Vicar sat as he was, staring humpily, and hoping that he would be allowed to remain long in the security of a mere spectator. The Bishop fingered his pectoral cross.

Presently the Bishop replaced the cross in his cincture, and leant forward as if to lay a hand on Honor. "My dear, you can tell us no more. Why not go and walk in the gardens for a while? I think we shall all be with you soon."

Honor murmured her gratitude and went.

The Bishop returned to thought, fingering the cross's cord. When, in time, he spoke, it was to say: "I, too, accept your story, my boy. Naturally I do. But I will reserve any comment of mine for the present. Perhaps Mr. Scrase will tell us what he thinks."

"My lord," began the Alderman, but his voice came huskily. He cleared his throat and freed the voice for an exordium in his best manner. Mr. Bray, meanwhile, rested his hands on his knees and watched his principal. "My lord, to begin with, I must say that it is with almost intolerable regret that I find myself in my present most painful position. I never thought to see myself doing what I am now, and I assure you that nothing but an intense loyalty to the Church would have compelled me to do it. That is so, is it not, Mr. Bray?"

"We are sure of that," said the Bishop.

"And for me it has been harder than for Mr. Bray. Every personal consideration that could operate has urged me to—to come to some compromise with my conscience. Mr. O'Grogan was a colleague of my son's in the Great War, and this fact alone almost stayed my hand. But, as you will see, other considerations transpired which determined me that these personal considerations must give way. I—I, too, will accept Mr. O'Grogan's version of the facts—I cannot

do otherwise—but I do not feel—I regret to say I cannot feel—that this justifies us in assuming that the incident is closed. Because, even if Mr. O’Grogan denies the—er—the complete offence, he has confessed to things which, in my judgment, are hardly less blameworthy——”

“Oh, no . . . no,” protested the Bishop.

“That is my view, my lord; and I cannot alter it.”

“But even if you are right, Mr. Scrase, we can forgive, can we not? If his dear wife has forgiven him——”

“The two cases are hardly parallel. Mrs. O’Grogan, I take it, thinks of her husband only as a man; we have to think of him as a minister; and it is our duty, as I see it, to ensure that the clergy who minister the sacraments to us have private lives that are above reproach. A married priest and a young girl—it is intolerable, my lord! And there is another aspect: it is our duty to see that the clergy who enjoy the emoluments of our Church do not betray it by teaching and writing things that are the diametrical opposite of everything they are paid to preach. Mr. O’Grogan, in his sermons and his writings——”

The Bishop shook his head. “They are not relevant to this charge, Mr. Scrase. They are a different question, surely. We may not agree with Mr. O’Grogan’s opinions—I do not myself—but I am an old man, and I can believe that new ideas must be tried out in a new world. No, his published opinions are not to the point—just now.”

The Alderman warmed. “They seem to me entirely to the point. When it comes to Mr. O’Grogan advocating——”

“If you will forgive me,” interrupted the Bishop, “is it not rather my province to see that sound doctrine——”

“And is it not our province?”—Mr. Scrase raised his voice: he never liked to be argued with, and he was exasperated, confused, that the Bishop should not be wholly on the side of him who was so wholly in the right—“if you will allow me to continue, my lord, is it not our province to make representations to you when treachery, as we conceive it, is being taught, and—apparently—practised? When it comes to Mr. O’Grogan advocating adultery to a youth within the walls of his church——”

“*What?*” exclaimed Tony.

Mr. Bray’s eyes, which had wandered during the discussion on ecclesiastical discipline, now came smartly back to attention.

Mr. Scrase turned to Tony. “You may remember a young

man seeking your advice, after Evensong one night, in the matter of some wretched intrigue——”

“I should not phrase it like that,” said Tony, warming too. “His was an unhappy story, and he only wanted to do what was right.”

“*Tch!*” objected the Alderman.

“But has he, then, told you what I said?”

“It came out in conversation. He was arguing with me the rights and wrongs of a divorce from his poor young wife, and when I told him that such a step was not to be contemplated for a moment, he threw it into my face that all clergy did not agree with me. He told me what you had said.”

“What did you say, my boy?” asked the Bishop.

“I told him, as far as I can remember, that it was all quite simple. I said that, if he just left it to the best that was in him, his difficulty would solve itself in time. I said that his love, in the end, would do exactly what it was worth.”

“And what did you mean by that?”

“That was only another way of saying, as I showed him, that he must leave it to the Mind of God, which would reveal itself in the end.”

“*Tch!*” came from the Alderman.

“But we already have the Mind of God in this matter—surely?” the Bishop submitted. “It has been given to us by our Master, has it not?”

As Tony was not prepared to argue this, the Alderman was left in occupation of the ground. “Exactly! Precisely!” he exclaimed, much relieved that the Bishop should be coming over to the right side. “And to teach anything else to our Young People is—in my judgment—treachery. I cannot say less. And I feel this so strongly that, were Mr. O’Grogan to leave this diocese and seek employment elsewhere, I should feel—yes, certainly I should!—I should feel compelled to make my representations to any bishop to whom he might apply——”

“No.” The Bishop shook his head, aggrieved. “That would be wrong, I think.”

“I have told you that I do not take as lenient a view as you, my lord,” affirmed the Alderman, heating again. “I have my convictions, and though I am old, I intend to—er—to fight for them. As long as I have life I shall join issue with the pernicious modern ideas that are sapping our national life at this time.” Canon Broadley did not glance up at this

plagiarism: possibly because he was quite unaware that he ever used the phrase. "Up to the end I intend to do all in my power to maintain the old standards of clean, straight living."

The Bishop, watching, came to the decision that Mr. Scrase would rest on this peroration. He turned towards Tony.

"As I have told you, my boy, I accept the whole of your story. And it seems to me that there are three courses before you. One is that nothing be done, that this charge be withdrawn, and that you should go on quietly with your work in your parish, doing it better, I am sure, because you have erred and have suffered. Yes, and with your dear wife at your side——"

"My lord," interrupted the Alderman.

The Bishop lifted his hand; and his jewelled ring sparkled in the light from the window. "Permit me a few minutes more, Mr. Scrase. This is the course that I should like best, but it would be difficult—exceedingly difficult. Unfortunately the story of this charge has become known—how I do not know—over the whole diocese, and your position among us, therefore, would be very uncomfortable."

"We could make it equally well known that the charge had been withdrawn," suggested Tony.

"That is what I would wish. Indeed, that is what I shall do. But Prebendary Broadley, and these gentlemen, have something to say as to whether the matter can stop there. After all, my boy, you must remember that they have some justification for the step they have taken. Again, there is the question whether you can do your best among us any more. It is the work that matters, is it not?"

Tony said nothing.

"The second course would be for you to resign your curacy, and leave this diocese—this province, even. But I am not happy about that. A sudden resignation would persuade people that this charge was true, and you are not in the full sense guilty. I know you are not; and you tried to do what was right, both of you—poor children. I don't like to think of judgment going against you by default."

"I understand, my lord."

"There is a third course: you could be arraigned at your own request before the Consistory Court, and there answer this charge with the story you have told us. . . . But I am so afraid you could get no other verdict than guilty. Consider,

my boy: your layman's clothes, the bed, the child slipping away early in the morning before the hotel was astir—and, added to this, the well-known fact that your books advocate a certain liberty. . . . Of course, if the child herself——”

“That is impossible, my lord.”

“I know . . . yes. . . . And then, again: even if you were acquitted, the story of your partial guilt would remain, and the suspicion of much more, and it would all have a terrible publicity. I don't think you will want to drag your wife—or your Church—through that.”

“No, my lord.”

“And so, after much thought, I cannot help feeling that my second suggestion would be the happiest and wisest for you: that you should, of your own free will, resign and seek a new sphere, perhaps in the Northern Province, even though—ah, but we will do all in our power—all of us, I am sure—to combat the tale that you were really guilty. I most certainly shall. . . . Now what do you say?”

Tony hesitated before answering: the eyes of all waited upon him.

Perhaps it was the old combative Tony who spoke first.

“I think I prefer your first suggestion, my lord; that things remain as they are. I am not guilty, and I am prepared to face any scandal there may be. There is always scandal.”

The Bishop looked towards the Vicar.

“And what does Prebendary Broadley say to that?”

“I”—the Vicar, alarmed, corrected some of his limpness in the chair. “I—I will accept whatever may be your lordship's ruling in this matter. Of course.”

“And Mr. Scrase and Mr. Bray—will they consent to no further steps being taken?”

“No.” The Alderman's answer was not immediate, but it was emphatic when it came. “No. After mature consideration, I do not feel willing to go as far as that. I have tried to be very fair, but you force me to say it: the case is blacker against Mr. O'Grogan than he has allowed to appear.”

“I have told the truth,” said Tony.

“That may be, but not in any detail. Have you told his lordship of your behaviour in a beechwood under the South Downs?”

Again Mr. Bray's attention came quickly home from a period of wandering.

"What do you mean?" asked Tony.

"Mr. O'Grogan used to live in those parts, my lord, and he was easily recognized; and the tale came round to us, just when we were considering our present step. It contributed, I may say, not a little to my decision."

"What is this, my boy?" inquired the Bishop. "You will explain it, I am sure."

"It is simple," said Tony. "Mr. Scrase does not seem to realize that I loved this girl. I lay with her in the beechwood and kissed her." He hesitated and gulped. The thought of the beechwood had tightened his throat. "We lay there together for a long time."

"M'm. Precisely," said the Alderman.

"We lay there for the whole of a summer day," added Tony.

"Precisely."

But the Bishop, after thought, nodded his head. He sighed heavily, and turned to the Alderman with a small, sad smile. Perhaps there was something of a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well . . . yes . . . yes . . . We are old, Mr. Scrase, but I suppose we mustn't forget what it was like to be in love."

The Bishop, to say the least of it, perplexed Mr. Scrase. He thrust him into a dark-browed pondering. Mr. Bray was also perplexed, but as he had been interested only in the objective facts of the story, and not in their subjective analysis, he did not ponder the Bishop's laxity, but returned to a consideration of the objective fact of his finger-nails. Canon Broadley, since he had sat himself from the beginning on this side understanding, was not affected.

All were silent. And in that silence Tony built his decision. Suddenly, and only at this moment—such had been the crowding of his thoughts—he remembered his father. His eyes might have strayed to the garden, but he was really seeing the Children's Breakfast Room in the old Vicarage home, and Keatings, Joyce, Derek, Peggy and himself sitting in shocked and sorrowful conclave, on that Saturday afternoon when they heard of their father's shameful elopement. How guilty they had thought him! They had been sorry for him, and Peggy had loved him more for his sinfulness, but none had thought that he had done anything but a completely shameful thing. Had it been so completely shameful after all? From within, these stories could seem so different. How strange that, after

a quarter of a century, his father's story, or much of it, should be repeating itself in him. His father had resigned and gone rather than quicken the impending storm. And all had agreed that he was wise in the interest of all.

Tony was not as guilty as the famous Dr. O'Grogan had been, but when he thought of his father, finished with one unreality at least, finished with a long spiritual malaise, he saw what the end of all this would be. And as he saw what he would do, such an uprush of warm pleasure surged in him, such a vista of sunny release stretched before his eyes, that he knew he must have wanted for a long time to do this—that there was a need in him to do it. And if the announcement of it, while satisfying the new character, gave a small glee to the combative Irishman in him, why not? No reason why the monk in him should not be a fighting monk.

He spoke, and all turned to hear him.

"There is yet a fourth course, my lord, which you have not mentioned. It is that I should withdraw, not only from my curacy, but from the ministry too. That is what I shall ask your permission to do."

"Oh, no," protested the Bishop. "No. We shall want you and your work. . . . Mr. Scrase does not desire that."

"I think *I* desire it, my lord. I think I have desired it for some time. I want to be free to think and write what I like. I do not know how my thoughts may go, but I feel I must be free from these threats of disciplinary action."

"It would be a pity. A great pity," said the Bishop, shaking his head. "Come, Mr. Scrase, you will join me in telling him that you never desired so extreme a step as that."

"I—er——" The Alderman, not having known what he desired, was at a loss for a reply. "No, I think that would have been going too far. I imagined some punishment, and an undertaking from Mr. O'Grogan that he would be more loyal in the future."

"And I cannot give that undertaking. I may want to write in the future many things that would be quite tolerable in a layman, but quite unbecoming—and even disloyal, as Mr. Scrase puts it—in a priest. No, I feel sure that this is the best and wisest step."

"You must not decide on this quickly, my son. If you resign your Orders, there is no returning."

"Is that so?" asked Tony, surprised. "But why?"

“If a man relinquishes his Orders, the Church does not allow him, after reconsideration, to return.”

A faint, questioning, demurring smile lifted Tony's brows. “But that does not seem very wise?”

“It is the Church's law,” said the Bishop; and one might suspect that he, too, doubted if it were very wise.

“Then I must accept it,” said Tony. “I feel certain I have come to my decision.”

“You must think a great deal over it, my son; and I will be praying for you.” The Bishop stared at the ground; then lifted his eyes to say: “If you should decide to do it, remember that a writer's work can always be priestly. He is trying to interpret God to Man, is he not?—and—yes, to do his trifle towards purifying the world. And that is just what we are all trying to do.” He sighed. “But, whatever your step, you will keep your work priestly, I know. You will always remember that you were once ordained a priest.”

CHAPTER VI

AS FAR AS EYE CAN SEE, THE END

TONY lives now in a village on a slope of the South Downs. It lies at the eastward end of that range, under Firle Beacon, and well away from Wolstonbury, which, though some years have passed since Mary went—and though he may be one of the fools of the world—he still finds too hard to bear. It is a place of flint cottages whose gardens blow at midsummer with geranium, delphinium, Canterbury bell, foxglove and creeping rose. A yew path leads to the door of the church, which is also built of flint and has a squat battlemented tower with a squat pyramid for a spire. The ruddiest sycamore in England stands in the road outside. A farm's outhouses straggle near the church; and the farmer, who would seem to be a romantic fellow, has hung above his main entrance an old ox-yoke, like a post-house sign. In brief, like Poynings, Seddlescombe and other downland names, it is a pocket of the past, and a pleasant home for one with an affection for England and a desire to think and an ambition to chisel his thoughts into verse.

Tony is much poorer than he was, because, in his ever-increasing desire to be loyal to the reality of himself, which he is discovering so late in life, he has abandoned the writing of satirical prose, and returned to his first mistress, poetry; which is to imply that he lives on the moneys so generously settled upon him by the mistress discarded. And they are more than enough to pay for the third cottage on the right, as you go down the hill.

He is far from unhappy. He adventures not only in thought; for often, ruck-sack on back, he wanders alone over the England that is dear to him (and was Mary's delight) and away into other parts of the world. And Honor and he have

their lively days in Lewes (which is possible, to those who know how), and in the sea-towns and in London; and many friends stay with them in the cottage, which is roomy. When Joyce was on furlough from India, she and Major Len Daubeney and Peggy all crowded into it somehow; and there were good times and laughter on the hills. They took the lunch from their ruck-sacks, spread it on a slope that commanded the Cuckmere valley and the Pevensey Levels, and ate it, chattering of old, ridiculous things.

Peggy comes more often than any other; and it is probable that some of the happiest times that Peggy and Tony know are when they are striding together along the crests of the downs, through the windy warmth of a cloudless day or through the dampness of a sea-fret. For each is the other's confidant, and there are few occupations so pleasant as talking about ourselves when we are certain that our listener is as interested as we.

He gives her all his ideas; and be sure they are various and lively. He tells her of a growing compassion for this sad, silly, modern world which has neither standards nor discipline. Which thinks that it knows enough now (bless its poor childish simplicity!) to laugh at the standards of the past and live by the light of reason alone. As if the flaw in its reasoning were not waiting to laugh at it, only a few paces on! And another flaw behind that. And then another. Till one day, perhaps, it will learn that, though reason is an excellent business manager, it needs for its partners faith and feeling too. Not that he is retreating, as he grows older, to the strong-points and block-houses of Alderman Scrase. He has little use for pure prejudice, whether it be the prejudice of the ancients or the prejudice of the moderns; but, let it be confessed, he has a fancy that, for the moment, the prejudices of the ancients are somewhat the more admirable of the two. No doubt Alderman Scrase and all his type will have to go, but one can admire a tough old fighter, who dies hard. And one can suspect that the extremest of his opponents have not so much more of the truth than he.

"Don't you agree, Peggy?"

And Peggy nods. It is not difficult for her to agree with him in all this.

Often they talk of Mary Leith, and wonder where she is now. Is she, do you think, by her lake in Western Ontario?

"I shall always believe," says Tony, "that we did love each other up to the full power of our natures—and her power was larger than mine. . . . Or it was, at the beginning," he adds quickly, "before I set out to equal her. She was fresh and unspoiled by Time."

"And she will never be spoiled now," Peggy suggests, rather softly. "She will go on and on."

"I believe that's true. And as for me—God knows that I have done with highfalutin and pretty-pretty, Peggy; they exact too heavy a price when brought to the touch of reality; but I do believe I am speaking simple truth when I say that she came into my life like an angel, turning most things to good. How it all came about would be too long a story to tell, and she would hardly believe herself big enough to have done it; but that is what happened."

"Of course," agrees Peggy, with her tranquil faith. "That is what was meant to happen, I think."

For many months Tony kept the last letter that he received from Mary in the breast-pocket of any coat that he was wearing, but he could not take it out and read it again. He wanted it to be there, but he could not read it. In point of fact, it is there now; he does not desire the wisdom which would enable him to remove it; but nowadays he is able sometimes to read it, when he is alone on the downs. It was written when her ship was nearing Quebec; and it begins:

"This is the last letter that I must write to you, dearest. In a few hours I shall go ashore and really begin to be good. No more of this self-indulgence! Tony dear, I want to say this: you are never to worry about me. One part of me is gloriously happy, and always will be, I think. So happy! I am writing this letter as we move up the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and I suppose it is this fact which has made me sit down and write to you just once more. Oh Tony, I loved England, but I love Canada too. You should see it as it is now. Even I did not know that it could be so marvellous, because this is the first time I have come up the Gulf in the fall. It is two o'clock in the afternoon, and the water is as smooth and quiet as milk, just as it was that night on the *Sagaman*. (Fancy, it is seven o'clock in the evening in England, because we are about five hours earlier than you. I am always thinking out what the time is in England!) As you know, the maples come down to the water's edge on the northern shore, and to-day

they are every possible shade from light yellow to deep red ; they are orange and russet and crimson and flame, and many other colours that *you* could find words for, but I can't ; and the water reflects them all, as the ship moves past, ever so smoothly—oh, I wish one day you could see it just like this, Tony dear ! And the firs stand dark and unmoved among it all, and the little white houses of the French-Canadian *habitants* dot themselves all along the coast. Behind, the Laurentian Hills run in a long, leaden range ; and in front, as you used to say, the islands seem to swing round in their own quiet lakes, as the ship goes on. It is all so beautiful. I love it, and I am going to love it more and more."

Ah well ; we do not know the mystery ; we can but take it as it is, and nerve ourselves for loss, and for a silence like the bird-broken silence up here, where the down-crests curve round in the loneliness of the sky. Pass, dearest friend of all. All's well.



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